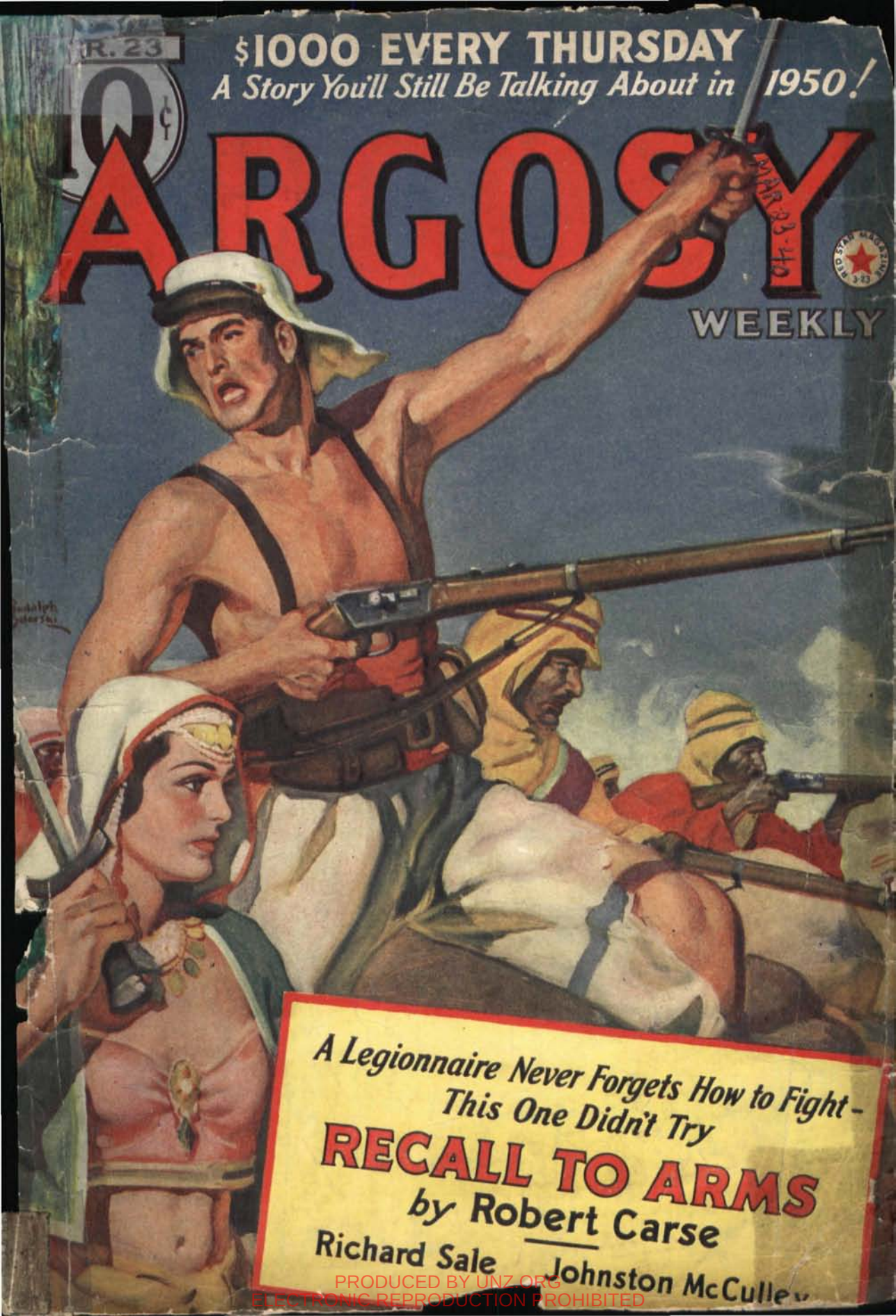

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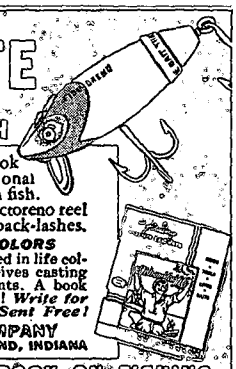

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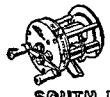

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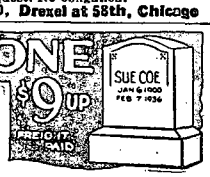

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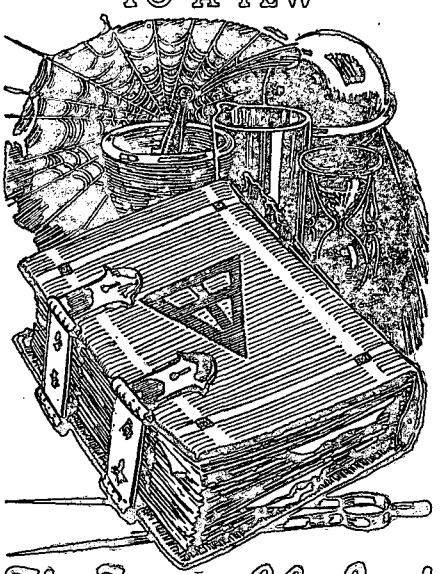

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CHAPTER I

ARISE, KATY BELLE!

"WASHINGTON!" he shouted. "That man. Oh for his neck in my hands! Build bridges to nowhere and then put rivers under 'em. Rip the roof off the national debt. Taxes, taxes, taxes. Why didn't I see Heymann's report before?"

J. G. Galway delivered himself of a bellow that could be heard the entire length and breadth of the Galway Building's twenty-first floor. He pounded his desk; and a framed motto (*Do It Now*) toppled from one corner.

Secretaries scurried.

Miss Susan Galway, grandniece of the great gray tycoon (a thing of beauty, no less) applauded prettily. "Artillery," she said. "Goody; I love cannons."

But Adam Fosdick, a secretary, appeared to be on the verge of tears. He

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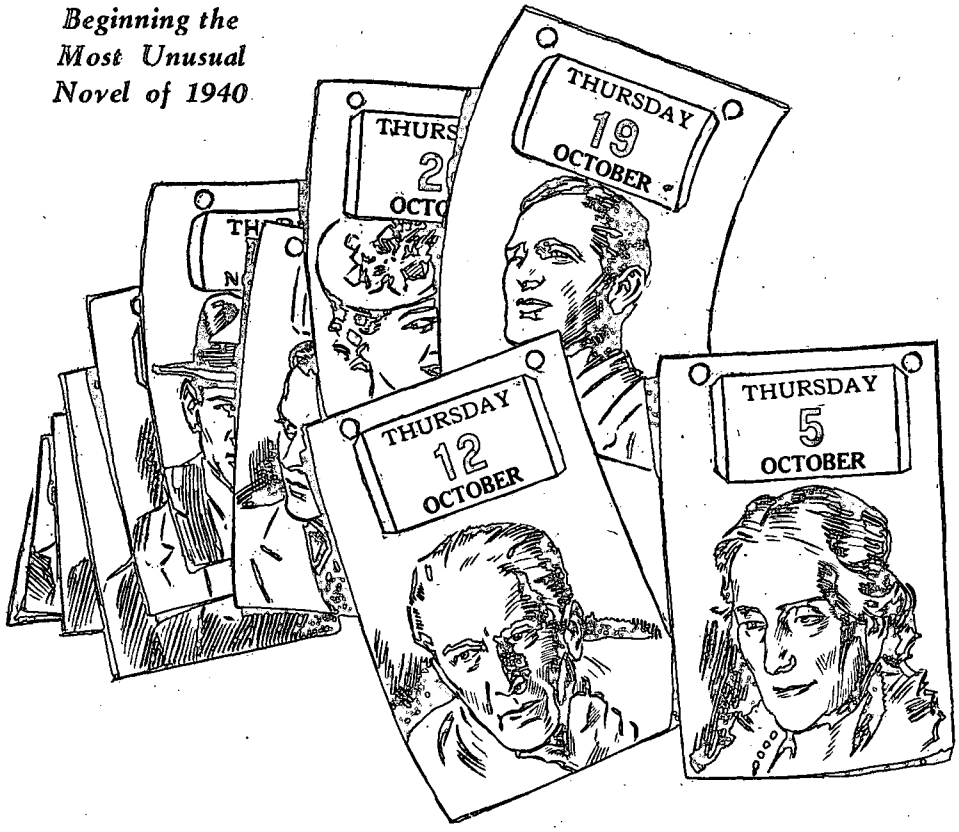
Beginning the Most Unusual Novel of 1940



Step up, podners, with your hands out and your heads up for the resurrection of the Katy Belle. She was a mul- and she was a mine; and now—because a roaring two-fisted tycoon hates the brain-trusters—she's going to be a handout. But watch her close: for love and hate, fulfillment and despair, happiness - sudden death will follow where she strikes with her check for a grand a week

called on a subordinate to get Washington, long distance. He said, "The report, Mr. Galway—I made a note of it."

"A note!" The behemoth of big business and publishing turned as near purple as it was possible for him to get. "You send me a billet-doux, when the entire world is crashing about my ears! Listen to this. . . ."

Thus Thursday morning—a momentous Thursday morning—in the offices of Jonas Gardiner Galway, poised furiously in this shattering moment of his forty-year career as breaker-boy, pugilist, saloonkeeper, mine expert, stock promoter, real-estate developer, publisher, banker, and free-lance financial buccaneer.

A moment—make no mistake about it—that was to change the lives of a dozen people. Radically. And thousands more besides . . .

"Mr. Heymann, sir," a secretary breathed. "From Washington, sir." She plugged in the phone and fled.

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"Heymann"—The great economic royalist began with a roar that might have reached the Capitol dome without benefit of wires. "At this late hour, I find this report from you on my desk. I quote:

" 'Monthly payments of one hundred dollars to all over sixty-five are proposed in the new Wheelock bill, which has the backing of a strong Senatorial bloc. The coalition of pressure groups which have been advocating the Townsend and other Federal pension plans has been promised the support of the silver subsidy filibusterers in backing this bill. Action on this legislation will follow the lines indicated in my memorandum of two weeks past.' End quote."

J. G. Galway put the paper down and unleashed new fury into the telephone. "Two weeks—and I learn about it for the first time now. A fine organization! Now see here. . . ."

His opening discourse dealt with politicians generically and genetically and was suitable only for the broader-minded adult. The body of his diatribe referred to an individual called *him*—enunciated with the utmost loathing—and convincingly exploded the theory that even Chinese can subsist by taking in each other's weekly wash.

At length, his frenzy subsiding, he cradled the receiver.

"Harrumph," he said. "There's still some time. I might have known they'd pick a presidential year to go to the madhouse all at once. But we'll stop 'em, by thunder. We'll blast 'em with headlines and make the radios roar.

"Arrange an editorial meeting, Fosdick. Telephone the publishers I know. We've got to stop those vote-crazy imbeciles now before they build a ten-wide breadline from here to the Panama Canal."

"Yes sir. Er—about the attorneys, J. G.—"

"What attorneys?"

"Gambrill and Hutchins and—er—the rest. They've been waiting almost an hour now."

"Well, let 'em wait. Tell 'em I'm busy. What do they want here anyhow?"

There was no need for Fosdick to tell him. He remembered the fatal date with a sudden groan. The tax statement, the final adjustments: more money to pay out, more dollars flung into a bottomless maw. It was for this unpleasant purpose he had come to his office today.

"All right, all right," he said wearily. "In the conference room in five minutes. No. Tell 'em to come on in here."

He dry-washed his face with big lean hands. "Taxes, more taxes. Pay and pay, while those besotted morons keep borrowing and spending at a rate that's already put our great-great-grandkids in hock. A hundred a month to every citizen over sixty-five, blah! Next they'll drop the limit to sixty. Before we know it we're apt to be paying a thousand a week to everybody beyond the age of five."

"Ruin," croaked Fosdick. "Ruin."

"It never has worked in the history of the world," J. G. Galway said. "It never will. Picture a hundred million people in a giant ring with each man rifling his neighbor's pocket. That's where we're heading. That's America tomorrow, gentlemen—your country and mine!"

Miss Susan Galway withheld applause. On the stage, she thought, this speech would be the cue for pigeons to be released from the wings, for the band to strike up a military march and the brave flags to fly in parade. Here

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is was followed prosaically by the ushering in of an embassy of four.

SUSAN straightened her toque. Two of the lawyers were as dry and prim as their briefs; the third was swart and gooey; but the fourth—if you liked men with straight noses and hair that dark . . .

"Good morning, good morning," said one of the prim little men briskly, like a bailiff opening court. "Well, here we are. Hutchins and I are ready for you, J. G. You know Cohen, our Federal expert. This is Harwood, field man, just back from the Southwest today with the whole Katy Belle situation right at his fingertips."

Harwood. Susan made special note of that name. The straight-nosed. The dark-haired.

J. G. nodded and garrumphed. "I employ some three hundred bookkeepers and cashiers," he announced. "I pay my lawyers and accountants a pretty penny every year. Yet all of them together, with all their brains, let a fool blunder like the Katy Belle crop up. I want it straightened out right now. A man don't live forever, you know, and I don't have to tell you fellows how those inheritance taxes gouge."

Mr. Hutchins smiled. Mr. Gambrill rubbed his hands.

No, not so much like Gable, Miss Susan decided. A tall Lew Ayers would describe him better. She frowned and tugged the hem of her skirt.

"Well, what's the figures?" said J. G. "The records here—of course they're not complete—show a cost of a couple hundred thousand in taxes to straighten it out. That's all right. We're willing to pay for our mistake. But we can't afford beyond that figure, gentlemen. Our consolidated report shows a mighty small profit as it stands and I won't have the Galway Enterprises dipping in the red. All right, let's see your papers. What's the cost?"

"Er—ah—Harwood has them," Mr. Gambrill said. "We had him rush straight here from the airport. Well Harwood, what's the figure? How does it look?"

"Wonderful," breathed young Thomas Harwood (who had been looking at Susan), and was immediately returned to contemplations more mathematical by J. G. Galway's roar. "I mean—why yes, I have the figures here."

He advanced his briefcase to the royal desk and tugged at the zipper. "The office will have to check again, of course, but I believe I have it substantially right. I estimate the tax cost at something over three and a half million."

Even Miss Susan gasped.

"Three million eight hundred and eighty-four thousand," said Thomas Harwood.

The throne chair tottered as J. G. Galway sprang up. His fists were clenched, his throat straining for a calliope blast; but as he blindly moved to round the desk and strike this blaspheming idiot down his limping toe collided with unyielding oak and was plunged in a bath of pain's hellfire. Wrath and agony wrestled for the right-of-way in his windpipe and shared the honors in a devilish duet.

When the tumult and the shouting died, when the doctors and delegations had departed, Miss Susan held the office battlefield with her great-uncle and the soft afternoon shadows.

Jonas G. Galway reclined at unease in a leather armchair, with his bandaged foot propped before him, and felt remorse.

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"It isn't the money," he said. "There's money enough to make millionaires of your children's children, and most of it safe in trust. And it's not that I like a dollar for the dollar's sake. I've sent my share of expeditions out, I've built parks and started research foundations and I still keep 'em going. The zoos and museums I help support—"

"I know, darling," Susan soothed. "You're a fine great-hearted noble man and at least I love you."

"I'll never pay taxes on the Katy Belle," he groaned. "It's all a colossal error, a blunder, a mistake. Lawyers, bookkeepers—not an ounce of brain in a milion of 'em!"

"It's a lovely name though, Katy Belle," she said. Tell me, Uncle Josh, was she pretty? Was Katy Belle the girl you left behind, the one who might have been?"

"She was a mule, a jenny," the famed misogynist said. "We named the mine after Black O'Leary's mule. That was in New Mexico. The name was lucky so *I* tied her on some Texas oil lands I came to own. When things got booming I came on East. I started companies galore."

He winced horribly and glared down at his mummied foot. "I'll fire every auditor I've got. I'll clean the whole bunch out!"

"Now, now—" she cautioned. "Tell Susan about it. What's all this scandal about poor Katy Belle?"

WITH asides of imprecation and intermittent moans he sketched a tale of high finance and low practice that spanned back thirty years. Only the most astute corporation attorney could have followed the mazes of stock issues and amalgamations and hypothecations and inter-company loans —upon occasion they stumped even J. G. G. himself—but in the end Susan had a glimmering of the sad state of affairs.

"In other words," she said, "you used your Katy Belle profits to finance your other finaglings. Even after poor Katy's oil had been sucked dry you still kept her bones alive. You passed her cash along to this company and that one and never paid it back. You bloated so fast you couldn't remember which pocket you took the change from."

"Damn that foot!" he grumphed. "A preposterous oversight, that's all."

"Well, forget it then. Let Katy sleep in peace."

"Inheritance taxes." He chewed the words and spat them out. "They brutalize you there."

"Then go ahead and pay it off. You'll still have sixty million umbrellas in case of a rainy day."

"But it's the principle of the thing," he rasped. "Handing my hard-earned cash to those Washington dream-book economists so they can run the country deeper into ruin. Bonus schemes, pension grabs, every man a king—"

She had been glancing among the scattered documents as she talked, and now she smiled. Susan had come to live with her fabulous great-uncle at the age of ten and discovered soon thereafter that she was the one human who could bully him.

"Well, it's just too bad," she said. "It's a shame you took the trouble to cheat those others out of their shares in the Katy Belle in the first place. Think of the bother you'd have saved."

"Cheated?" He glared. "What nonsense have you got there?"

The papers she gave him were brown-edged and he wrinkled his nose at the dry smell of them. Frowning,

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Flynn and his eyes seemed to be more dangerous.

Probably the impetuous type—she frowned—who rushed into marriage young. His wife would be blond and clinging, and very likely was weeping now over her ruined dinner in an apartment in Dobb's Ferry or Mamaroneck.

J. G. Galway, who had been practicing yogi contemplation on the distant wall, returned to the conversation on the bounce. "Yes, gentlemen, yes," he said. "I don't care how you arrange it so long as it's arranged.

"I have also thought out a further improvement. In each case the payment must be to an individual. In the event of multiple heirs the nearest and worthiest of kin will be selected. Waivers and releases can be arranged. Also, the payments will be made on Thursday—a thousand dollars every Thursday! What a sensation that will make."

"But that's crookeder than ever!" cried Mr. Cohen. "They'll nail you to the cross. They'll sue for compound penalties—"

"Let 'em sue," said the scofflaw. "What in thunder can they prove? What do they know about the Katy Belle? Of course it would be best all around if I didn't appear personally in the picture. Too much notoriety, you know. However—just draw up the transfer papers and date 'em back. Find out who you'll have to bribe. Let's see now who we can pick. . . ."

He went into conference with the far wall again while the tax experts collected in a huddle. At length:

"I've also decided," said J. G. expansively, "that our own papers won't play this up at first. We'll let the other fellows start the snowball rolling before we get behind it. We'll ambush 'em, that's what. We'll skin that Wheelock's pants off."

"Er—ah—ahem," said Mr. Hutchins. "Yes, ahem. Now J. G., I don't know how you'll take this. We seem to have some disagreement here. Under the circumstances it might be best if this Katy Belle matter were handled as a separate affair. Perhaps—ahem—by other than your usual attorneys of record. We'll be happy to defend of course if anything goes wrong, but as things stand here we can't see our way—"

"Tophet," said Galway, strangely calm, "does it stink that bad? Is it that much riper than some of those other deals you buzzards cooked up?"

"Oh no," said Mr. Gambrill hastily. "Not at all. It's simply that our standing in the tax courts—"

"Our connections in Washington—" Mr. Hutchins said.

"Too hot to handle." Thus Mr. Cohen. "To me it's pure dynamite."

J. G. Galway studied them benignly. He glanced across at his grandniece as if calling her to behold his unruffled dignity and impervious poise. "Well, well," he said mildly. "My, my. And you, young man, do you agree?"

Thomas Harwood said, "I hardly—I'm only—" and then deserted the Gambrill-Hutchins banner. "No, I don't," he stated, lifting a brow at Cohen. "It's all a question of interpretation. In view of the period during which the assets were realized and the changing tax factors involved—"

"Hmmmmm," J. G. Galway purred. "You conducted the field work of this investigation, eh young fellow? You're familiar with the background and details of the Katy Belle as she stands?"

"Yes sir."

"The trouble with lawyers," J. G. Galway addressed a corner of the

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he began to read. Soon he was chuckling.

"Yep," he chuckled, "here's the original incorporation, all right. Doc Pickering vice-president, Frank O'Leary secretary. We elected Blackie secretary for a joke. All he could write was his name. . . . Stockholders of record—hmmmmm."

He looked up at Susan after a moment, then studied the ceiling a while. "You wouldn't call it cheating," he said. "It was all legal and aboveboard. They didn't want to go ahead as fast as I did. We straightened it out with new stock, non-participating, and I just took control, that's all. In those days you kept your eyes peeled for Number One or else you got your hair lifted."

He coughed. "Steve Minnick—we called him Shotgun. Lucian Holdcraft ran the livery barn. . . . Well, if they're not all dead by now they're old enough to start living off the government. A hundred a month and more to come."

The rough edge of his tantrum was wearing off, Susan could see, so she talked idly on. "It serves you right for being such a bloody old pirate," she scolded. "If you hadn't hocus-pocused those others maybe one of them would be saddled now with Katy Belle's headache. Or at least you'd have had seven others to share it. Personally—"

"Wait—" said J. G. Galway hoarsely.

He had stiffened in his chair like a bird dog. "You got it, Susy!" he cried. "You hit it on the nose! Call Fosdick, call the auditors, get my attorneys!"

"Whoa," she cried in alarm. "Easy, boy. The doctor said—"

"Damn the doctors! You've hit it, honey; you showed me the way. We'll reinstate the old stock, don't you see, and let the dividends flow. A thousand dollars every week to each original holder or to his heirs and assigns. Thousands I won't have to pay taxes on; the government can yell in a rain-barrel for it. We'll play it up in every paper I own and steal their pension thunder. Here's the way to drive the lesson home!"

Susan hurried to the office door. "Miss McAfee, Miss Baxter," she called. "Come here and help me hold him; he's headed for the barn."

CHAPTER II

INITIATION OF X9

AT NINE of the evening, two bodyguards still patrolled the outer hallways of the Galway Building's twenty-first floor. In the office of J. G. Galway was an afterwaft of coffee and the voices of weary men who had blunted the blades of their logic against the dictator's shield of "You Must."

Mr. Hutchins said, "Now wait, please. Let's outline the problem again and perhaps we'll find a fresh attack. Now, let's see, J. G. merely wants to rectify a previous — er — injustice. That's legal. The law's with him there. And rather than engage in an involved complication of stock transfers he simply elects to void a previous company transaction, thus allowing the status to revert—"

"He can't," wheezed Mr. Cohen, the Federal expert. "That's covered in section 3, item 7A. Read the Capital Gains interpretation. Check on our own Gift Tax memoranda. It's illegal, a felony, a jail offense!"

"Don't be too legalistic, Cohen," said Mr. Gambrill sharply.

The dark young Thomas Harwood did not engage in these wordy skirmishes, Miss Susan noted with approval. Also, under the lights, his jaw had the strong lean line that suggested Errol

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room, "is that they hide their noses too deep in their law books. Like ostriches. They're always clucking, 'Can't-can't-can't.'

"Now I want a man to take over the Katy Belle under conditions I will stipulate. We'll make those conditions as legal and honest as we can. If there's suits or injunctions I'll fight 'em and stand the costs.

"I'll pay this man a good monthly wage and back him to the hilt. If he shows he's got the stuff then he's on my payroll for life. Do you"—if his arm had been three feet longer his finger would have spitted Thomas Harwood—"do you, young man, want the job with Katy Belle?"

There was an impulse Harwood had to glance at the corner where the girl sat. He banished this weakness and turned to Mr. Hutchins: "Sir, I wish to tender my resignation, effective at once."

J. G. Galway thumped the desk. "That's the boy!" he roared. "Susy, call those muscle men out of the hall. I'll need some help with this foot. You, young man, be out at my house by ten tomorrow morning.

"Third term, eh? Nominating conventions, eh? We'll show 'em how to beat the drum for the big campaign. We're going to give those Santa Clauses down in Washington a dose of their own soothing syrup, son, and feed it to 'em with a red-hot spoon."

AMONG the physical assets of Thomas Harwood at the age of twenty-eight were (a) jaw which suggested decisiveness and stubborn competence, and (b) an easy, friendly habit of smiling that belied the austerity of his forthright Covenanter's nose.

He had the athletic stride and shoulders of the number two or blocking back, developed during the four years at his state university when he sat in the stadium of autumnal afternoons and exhorted the team to hold that line.

At Harvard Law School he had acquired an excellent squash backhand and a disregard for the safety of lung and limb which only the devotees of water polo truly know. He golfed in the high nineties and wrote with regularity if not devotion to the maternal uncle, his only kinsman, who had supplied the funds for a law degree and was still occasionally querulous on the subject of reperation.

Of women and the emotional life T. Harwood had his modest share. His conclusions had been that his devotion was best invested in Blackstone; that love is a gooey commodity, wedlock a contract between zanies wherein they engage to prove that two can enjoy unhappiness cheaper than one.

Some of these considerations were in his mind as he emerged from the Galway Building into the ten o'clock quiet of the night. It had been his first flight among financial constellations of such magnitude, and the customary dizziness accompanied descent from the stratosphere.

Morning found him more sober.

It was a dour gray morning, as he learned on his way to the station; and at his Long Island destination he disembarked into a drizzle of rain. He was still feeling reasonably cheerful though, until his search for a cab was interrupted by the firm pronunciation of his name repeated thrice.

"Yes," he called. "Right here."

"Mr. Harwood?" An imposing figure in Galway green tried to wrest away his briefcase and was narrowly foiled.

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"Yes, I'm Harwood. What's up?"

"You are expected, sir. Right this way, sir."

The waiting vehicle could have been produced solely by the mating of a hearse with a viceroy's palanquin. "Caviar," muttered the rebellious passenger as he sank in the softness of a seat that was doubtless eight feet deep with a base of solid platinum to rest upon. "I'll take ham and eggs."

The ivied outer wall of the Galway manse and the keeper at the electric gate reminded a man that he wore six-dollar shoes and might be needing a haircut. The sweeping drive and the manicured terraces were bitter pills for an Oklahoma druggist's son.

"Yaaah!" said Thomas Harwood silently, and only by clenching his teeth did he withhold a derisive waggle of tongue.

Somewhat to his surprise he was not frisked at the doorway for cold chisels, marlinspikes or his burglars' wax. He was ushered to a room ponderous with books where Susan Galway sat behind a coffee table.

In his newborn dislike of fulsome riches and all that pertained thereto he hardly noticed the girl or what she wore. Her dress was trim and jaunty and red as were her low-heeled sandals and the ribbon that tied her burnished hair; but aside from this and the fact that she wore a simple sterling bracelet and a small heal ring on the third finger of her right hand he was scarcely aware of her accoutrements at all.

"Hello there," she said. "Will you join the morning tipple?"

He would not. His no was formal and firm. It was remarkable, he thought, how mistaken his first appraisal of this girl had been. In the office last night her nose had been a line of Phidian beauty, but now he saw it was plainly impertinent. The voice that had been mellow as distant chimes was now revealed as no more than brightly superficial.

"Will your uncle be able to see me soon?" he inquired.

She laughed. "I'm afraid, Mr. Harwood, that J. G. will be compelled to take the veil for a week or so. His gout—his ankle, rather, fills his chamber with most horrendous groans."

Harwood recognized the light and airy approach. (It's cricket to be chummy with the help this yeah, y' know.) He said, "I'll—ah—come back in a week then unless notified. My telephone—"

"Hey! Come back here!" she called. "We're getting right to work this very minute."

"Then he hasn't decided to abandon—"

"Abandon!" she exclaimed. "Why right this minute Miss Katy Belle is the hottest baby in J. G. Galway's dollhouse. He'll hardly talk of anything else. Right now he's planning ways and means of tying this business in with the pre-convention ballyhoo. It's a knot in the hangnoose, so he says, that will hoist these Washington crackpots higher than Haman."

"But what are his plans? How shall I—"

"Listen," she said confidentially. "You know what he's going to do? He's switching the anti-pension lobbies over to the other side of the fence. He's persuading the people with whom he has influence to withdraw their present opposition to the Wheelock Bill and help get it rolling. Build up the scarecrow then knock it down. Get the idea?"

"Yes, but I've hardly started—"

"He's hot on the political angle right

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now. He's planning the placards and banners he'll have printed and arranging a nationwide Sanity Day with brass bands and torch parades. Fosdick has orders to furnish ten million German marks, the old worthless ones, and they're to be enclosed in letters explaining how the same thing will happen here if the citizenry doesn't rise in wrath and run the rascals out. And those are just some of the highlights."

When she spoke this way, swift and excited, her eyes had a shining depth that the blue of no mountain lake could match. They held a translucence, that is to say, which might have been attracting the case of Miss Sadie Glutz of Macy's but was better classified in the present case as self-satisfied and domineering.

"But the Katy Belle," he protested. "I don't see—"

"OH YES." She smiled. "Katy Belle is to become a symbol. It seems that you and I, Mr. Harwood, are to saddle old Kate and let 'er buck. You'll do the work, of course, and I, as the member of the Galway clan least known to the public eye, will handle the liason detail. We'll meet under the old bridge in the dark of the moon, I suppose. How will it be if I use the alias Agent X8 when I call?"

"Very amusing," Harwood said. "I understood this was a financial transaction."

She narrowed her eyes a trifle but continued to smile as she went on:

"It is. We're going to be very businesslike about it, leaving all the publicity trimming to Uncle Jonas. I beleve that an office is being prepared for you. Fosdick will handle that. Also a drawing account has been arranged with the Ajax Trust. You are to hire what permanent help you need and call upon me when special assistance is required. The resources of the Galway Enterprises are practically at your beck and call. Just rub the lamp and say 'Abracadabra.'"

He uttered a hollow sound that vaguely resembled "Ha-Ha."

"That's about all," said Susan Galway, "except that J. G. already has his hounds on the trail. They're scouring the Southwest for the original stockholders, if any, or the whereabouts of heirs or assigns. This information will be passed along to you, from which point you're on your own. There may be some minor difficulties but I'm sure you will iron them out. I might suggest, if you're not busy, that you stay for lunch. It might help us both to talk the whole thing over thoroughly."

Thomas Harwood gave a restrained portrayal of the startled faun. He attempted to explain in a breath the innumerable details that demanded his immediate presence in the city.

"Oh naturally," said Susan.

"Of course," she said.

But as he garbled on she found a pencil and rolled it between her fingers. A winter storm blew across the mountain lakes and ice began to form. She selected a sheet of paper.

"Incidentally, Mr. Harwood, before you go"—she glanced from under her brows in the best J. G. Galway manner—"my uncle would like some personal information as a matter of record. Now let's see—how old are you?"

He gave his age and ancestry and the outline of his scholastic career. Susan wrote cryptic jottings.

"Do you smoke? Do you drink to excess?"

"I—uh—yes. No. Moderately."

"Do you use narcotics of any sort?"

He swallowed. "No," he said.

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"And oh yes, Mr. Harwood, your marital status. Are you a benedict, Mr. Harwood?"

He grappled with his outraged manhood and was almost overthrown. To Harvard's lasting credit he squeezed out a mangled smile.

"Yes," he said. "Married, yes."

"Children, Mr. Harwood?"

"There are two, I believe, or possibly three," he said gravely, "the result of the union with my first wife. She was a Pawnee princess and her father struck oil. He had sixteen imported roadsters and two hundred orchid shirts with collars attached."

"Out where the handclasp is stronger," Susan murmured. "Did you marry young?"

"At fourteen," he said, "but we western women mature early. My difficulties with my present and third helpmeet will develop into a newspaper scandal any day now. I beat her shamefully and carouse each night with painted harpies. Yes, Miss Galway, you have wormed my secret out, and I suggest you run and tell your uncle right away. And tell him I'm sending a written resignation."

Susan flung the pencil down. She crumpled the paper and returned Harwood's malevolent glare.

"I'll tell him nothing of the sort," she said. "I'll have you know that Fosdick has aready called Gambrill and Hutchins and received a glowing testimonial of your virutes as a moral, decent, home-loving, upright young man. They mentioned everything except your ungovernable temper. And now, if you'll excuse me, please—"

Thomas Harwood went into the hall and cursed a civilization which required the services of two green automatons to supply a man with coat and hat. He chose to stand on the cool veranda to await the barouche to the station, and had been posted there less than sixty indignant seconds when he heard a sinister hiss nearby.

Susan peered at him from a narrowly opened window. She waved and smiled. "Goodbye, X9," she called brightly. "See you soon at headquarters. What do you think of 'Temper, temper, little man' as a password?"

CHAPTER III

URBAN FREE DELIVERY

THOMAS HARWOOD sat in his bright new offices and scowled at a newspaper. He could see a distorted reflection of his face in the chromium humidor that graced his desk, a grim reminder of how the passing days had aged him. Wistfully he recalled the gay laughing days of yesteryear that had chained him to his desk with the rest of the Gambrill-Hutchins galley slaves. He had known contentment then. Nothing to do but obey orders and copy precedent from the proper volume. If an annoying, pestiferous, exasperating female gadfly came buzzing in your ears you calmly slapped the tormentor down.

He slapped the desk, then rubbed his stinging fingers wryly.

The headline reports from the domestic political front created in him a slight unease. "Expect Favorable Committee Report on Wheelock Bill," he read. "Pension Backers Assail Washington by Telegram, Letter and Phone," stated another block of 24-point.

"The moving finger of Galway writes," quoth the newest Galway employee. "Pretends he's still sick, the old buzzard, but he manages to get things done just the same."

The which was not the case in the

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new affairs of Thomas Harwood. Nothing had progressed with the expediency expected. He was laying a fine ripe egg, he told himself.

The groundwork had been completed, yes, but the honors for this went chiefly to the sour Adam Fosdick. By a masterful series of transfers, incorporations and judicious bribery he had delivered to Harwood a complete legalized organization, together with the inventories, assets and dummy directors pertaining thereto. The trouble was that T. Harwood had been derelict in producing the necessary liabilities.

On his desk was a portfolio, handsomely bound. He glowered at it. Reluctantly he drew it towards him and opened to the first neat page. He read:

JOHN PAGE PICKERING: b Foxcroft Twnshp Va Jan 11 1879 to Jno P and Sarah (nee Haynes). Ed county schls, Marshall Acad, B.S. U of Va 1900, M.D. Johns Hopkins '03. Practiced brfly Lunchburg, assume failing health sent him West. Wyo one year, inactive. Later . . .

Harwood read to the end of the dossier, and the bright red checkmark in the bottom corner allowed him a small pleased sigh of accomplishment.

If only the rest of the Katy Belle stockholders had been fine simple gentlemen of Doctor J. P. Pickering's breed! A perusal of the Medical Association lists had been quick to scout him out. Still hale and hearty, apparently, he was practicing in a small Virginia community. Samples of his handwriting, small news clippings, and a photo-print of a handsome lean-featured old fellow with a fine shock of hair—

No, not the slightest doubt of the good doctor's bonafides. Old Galway himself had stamped the doctor with authenticity.

But consider the rest of that harum-scarum crowd. Take Mr. Blackie O'Leary for example:

FRANCIS X. O'LEARY: Antecedents uncertn, date & place of birth unknown (Possible O'Leary not true name?) First trace Butte Mont, 1894, minor. Apptly about 25 yrs at time. Heavy drinkr, saloon brawlr, twice freed killings plea self-def. Later prosptr, mine ownr, speculator Mont, Nev, Tex. Married Julia Coyle, entertainr (?) of Kans Cty (?) in El Paso 1901. At least 3 chldrn (more?) O'Leary klld oilwell explsn Gradwell Okla, Jan 9 '08. Widow & fmly resided . . .

"A YOUNG woman to see you," his secretary was explaining. "A Miss Brocklehurst who says she is earning her way through cooking school by selling fire insurance."

"Gnaagh!" Harwood said.

"Why you sound just like a man I know," Susan announced from the doorway. She nodded to the secretary and seated herself. "Why do they always ask such silly questions?" she said, when the girl was gone. "She must have known perfectly well—"

Harwood stared at her and swallowed. "I'll—" he said, "uh—what was the business you wanted to see me about?"

She took her triumph smiling and did not twist the skewer. "It's about the Doctor Pickering checks. How many have you sent him?"

He hid his confusion behind the portfolio. "Three," he said. "The record's right here. I wanted to make a personal investigation, you'll recall, but your uncle said to handle it by mail. I think you quoted him as saying that Pickering was a queer duck and we'd better sneak up on him. So I just sent along the check and the formal notification, enclosing the stipulation to be signed. Is something wrong?"

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"No, but J. G. is always suspicious." Susan smiled again. "From the stories I've been hearing, this Doc Pickering *is* a peculiar kind of bird. I believe J. G. is a little leery of him. He was the scholar and philosopher of the old gang, I gather. Anyway, the question is why hasn't there been any publicity following the first three payments. Not a single line has been printed."

"But that's what your uncle wanted. He said to mail the checks out and let the other fellows start the story rolling."

"Sure," said Susan, "but nothing's happened. Not a peep. Hence J. G. thinks there must be something hammy in the state of ole Virginny. Have the checks been cashed? Has the stipulation been returned?"

No was the double-decked answer.

"Likewise and furthermore," she went on, "you are hereby instructed to hire more bloodhounds, gumshoes, *agents provocateurs* and such. The missing heirs must be produced, egad, and double quick. Things are going to happen in Washington these next three or four weeks and J. G. needs ammunition for the counter barrage."

"But we don't need more help," he protested. "We'll find our people any day now. We've practically got our hands on Lucian Holdcraft's grandson. Tell your uncle—

"Yes," he said, answering the summons of the phone.

"Mr. Harwood? Kansas City calling Mr. Thomas Har-wood. Just a *moment* please."

"Hello. . . . Oh yes, hello Dixon. The O'Leary-matter—wait now, let me write it down." He glanced at Susan triumphantly as he pawed for a pencil. "Okay Dixon. . . . Yes, this friend had a letter three months ago. . . . What—you mean right here in town? . . . . Sure, sure, Hotel LeGrande . . . . Of course I know your local man. I'll hop right up there and meet him."

In his excitement he gripped Susan's hand and shook it warmly. "Julia O'Leary," he exulted, "right here under our noses. Dixon unearthed an old-time friend who still gets occasional letters from her. The O'Leary children have all become bigshots, it seems, and are doing mama proud at the LeGrande. Dixon's local man checked it and she's actually there."

He paused to breathe and blink. "Well, I guess I'll trot along. I'll let you know—"

"You'll let me know nothing," she cried. "I'll have *you* know, sir, that the Galways are always in on the kill. Now don't get huffy. Don't start bristling up. Just be a nice boy—and afterwards, as a reward, I'll let you take me out to lunch."

THE Hotel LeGrande was primly imposing, sedately swank. Coffee might be had in the Petite Salon at eighty cents the serving.

"This is a bust," Susan said. "But I suppose an extra thousand or so always comes in handy to encrust another emerald in the collar of your itsybitsy Sealyham."

"*I* wouldn't know about that," said T. Harwood blandly. "Anyhow, it seems that the O'Leary offspring are the means of keeping mama in such lavish style. Well, more power to them. When I was a kid I planned to save my money and buy my mother a Spanish shawl—you know, a lot of fringe. I had almost three dollars put away."

Susan gave him a sidewise glance. "Did you—I mean, is she—"

"No," he said. "My father died too when I was about twelve. Well, this seems to be it."

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A doorman of vast dignity and mustaches ushered them from the cab. Dixon's appointed emissary was not in sight so they sought him in the gold-and-ivory lobby where the hush was as thick as the Persian rugs.

"His name is Moulton, I believe," Harwood said. "I'll see if he left a message."

But the frock-coated functionary at the desk was not acquainted with Mr. Moulton. He had left no message here, no.

"In that case will you ring Mrs. O'Leary's apartment, please. Mrs. Julia O'Leary. Say that Mr. Thomas Harwood would like to see her on a legal matter of advantage."

O'Leary? Julia? There was some mistake, the clerk was sure. He was quite familiar with the roster of guests and no O'Leary was listed there. "We've got to find Moulton," Harwood said. "Let's wait outside. He's been delayed, I guess."

Fifteen minutes of aimless picketing gained them only the doorman's suspicious attention. Finally Harwood buttonholed him.

"We're looking for a Mr. Moulton. Tall, lean fellow, sandy hair, smokes a pipe. You wouldn't know him, would you?"

"Mr. Moulton." The accent was vaguely Russian, the words precisely pronounced. "No sir. I am sorry, sir."

On the off chance Harwood said, "I don't suppose you'd know a Mrs. O'Leary either—a lady who lives here, or used to, sort of elderly?"

The doorman wagged his headpiece. He eyed the young man doubtfully, then came closer. "All right," he said suddenly, his accent fuzzed with a Dublin brogue, "what is it you want? Who are you now? Is it them boys of hers in some other trouble?"

"I'm a lawyer," Harwood explained. "Here—here's my card. There's some money, a sort of inheritance, and we've been trying to find Mrs. Julia O'Leary."

"Oh, then you're with that hook-nosed fellow, I suppose."

"Yes, that's Moulton. That's right."

"Well," said the doorman, still somewhat ominous, "maybe it's no harm. I saw your Mr. Moulton go 'round back to the manager's office. You can go there and ask your questions if you want."

Through a side entrance they reached a darkish room complete with desk, filing cabinets and an apologetic Mr. Moulton. "I got talking to Mr. Pierre, the manager here," he said, "and he was good enough to send word to Mrs. O'Leary a couple of minutes ago."

Mr. Pierre bowed. "Naturally we must be careful. Mrs. O'Leary has been with us for some time—"

"Yes sir," said a voice from the inner doorway. "You sent for me, sir? I hope there's nothing wrong."

THOMAS HARWOOD turned quickly and saw his own surprise mirrored in Susan's eyes. Mrs. O'Leary, gray and neat in her white cap and chambermaid's robe, was twisting the strings of her apron in one thin hand and watching the manager with mingled apprehension and bewilderment.

"There's nothing missing from the floor, is there?" she asked.

Mr. Pierre's smile was neatly waxed. "No, no, of course. This gentleman, these people here—"

"Wait," cried Susan. "Can't you see how nervous she is? Here, Mrs. O'Leary, sit down. Mr. Harwood is a lawyer and he has some news for

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you, good news. There's nothing to be afraid of, nothing wrong."

She smiled mechanically and sat, careful to hide the battered shoes beneath her skirt. She answered the lawyer's questions slowly and with care, as if she held the stand in a bewiggled and pompous court.

Her maiden name: Julia Mary Coyle. Her people were from Kansas. Yes, she had married Mr. O'Leary in El Paso. ("A long time ago," she said, faintly smiling.) The certificate was with the other papers in her trunk.

Harwood grinned. "I guess there's no doubt here. You're the lady we want, Mrs. O'Leary. There are certain small legalities to be observed but in the meantime I may tell you—"

He launched into the notification he had so carefully devised. In accordance with said revised by-law, he ended, he was pleased to tell her that a sum of three thousand dollars in back dividends was available at once. Furthermore the additional sum of one thousand dollars would be duly remitted on each succeeding Thursday, *pendente diem.*

She peered blankly at him, her lined face devoid of emotion. For an instant he thought she didn't understand until the corners of her taut mouth began to quiver.

"You—you mean it's mine?" she said. "That money mine? A thousand dollars each week for me?"

"Yes, Mrs. O'Leary. I'll send to the office right now for the checks if you want." He turned to his briefcase. "There are a few documents here I want you to sign."

She was shaking her head slowly. She turned her unbelieving glance to Susan, to the manager. "But I—" She faltered. "Do I have to sign? Can't I think it over first?"

Mr. Pierre started to chuckle but clipped the sound abruptly short upon receipt of Susan's frozen stare. He spread expressive hands.

"I mean," said Julia O'Leary, standing unsteadily, "that perhaps I could come to your office tomorrow, young man. Maybe Mr. Pierre could let me have the rest of the day to myself. I don't feel—I'd like to go home if I could."

"But naturally." Mr. Pierre bowed. "We will send a car—"

"Shut up!" Susan Galway ordered. She went across and whispered something. Mrs. O'Leary accepted the support of her arm as far as the door.

"My card!" called Harwood. "Give her my card."

CHAPTER IV

SURPRISE PARTY

JULIA O'LEARY, dressed in her own decent black, sat in the subway and studied the advertising cards. The cars were sparsely peopled at this time of day and somehow clean and restful without the pushing crowds. Her fingers felt along the handbag and pressed the reassuring stiffness of the dark young lawyer's card.

"Go ahead and have your cry," the pretty little girl had said. But Julia O'Leary would not weep. The years had drained her dry of common tears.

In pleasant lethargy she sat, keeping her thoughts apart from anything sensible at all. The familiar stations swept by: Church Avenue—Raleigh Square—

She slowly climbed the nineteen steps to street level. At the A & P she bought her pint of milk and a can of soup. Instead of bread today, she decided, she'd have a few of those fresh rolls from the baker. From there

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she went along three blocks to the cold-water tenement where she had her bed and abode.

The number over the portal was 299½. In the tin-walled lower hall was an odor she knew well and a double row of mailboxes. She peered at a dingy square of glass. No, nothing for Mrs. O'Leary today. But now and then there was a letter which made the stairway to the fourth floor a bit easier to climb.

On the second landing she stopped to rest as usual, and as she mounted once more she saw Mrs. Dysart's door was ajar. The shade must be pulled at the window though, for the interior of the room was dark. Perhaps she's sleeping, Mrs. O'Leary thought, and she went on by as softly as she could. She was not two steps past when Mrs. Dysart called out:

"Mrs. O'Leary—Julia—is that you? Is something wrong?"

"I thought you were having a nap," Mrs. O'Leary said.

She came back and stepped into the dark room.

"I was resting my eyes, that's all. Go on, pull up the shade. I could hardly believe my ears hearing you at two o'clock or whatever it is. Now don't tell me that your hoity-toity hotel has—"

"Oh no, nothing like that," said Mrs. O'Leary. "I asked for the afternoon off." She crossed the room and let the sunlight in. She had once believed that when people were blind their eyes gave them no more bother than would a tooth that had been pulled out; but Mrs. Dysart said this wasn't the case at all. Your eyes still stayed sensitive.

"I thought we could have an early supper," she said, "and I'd read you your paper before it gets dark."

SHE had known Mrs. Dysart for five years—or was it six now? Every evening she read the paper that the blind woman got in the mail, and by now she was more familiar with the local life and problems of Valley Falls, Pa., than with—well, than with anywhere.

It was strange to gossip about people you hadn't met and would never see, but after all there was no harm in it.

Mrs. Dysart was fifty-nine. Her husband had been a salesman, killed in the wreck that blinded her, and his insurance paid her a small income. The money would last a good deal longer than she would, she always said.

"I bought a little cake the baker had," said Mrs. O'Leary. "A touch of sweet will do us good."

"Julia O'Leary," said the blind woman, "what's got into you? Did you lose your job? There's something in your voice that I don't know whether you want to laugh or weep. What is it now?"

She laughed. She would tell Mrs. Dysart first of all; but not yet, not now. There were thoughts she had to think first, those thoughts all alone which would tell her what to do.

She laughed again. "Maybe it's a touch of cold in my throat. We'll have a good hot cup of tea."

The cake was good, two slices each. She read about the church festival in Valley Falls, the fight in town council about the paving, and all the way back to the comic page. Then in the dusk they went for their little walk, and by eight o'clock Julia O'Leary was trudging the stairs to her top-floor room.

She closed her door and locked it. For a little while she stood in darkness, watching the windows across the court and aware only of the glow from them.

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Here were the narrow plane of her bed, the shadow shapes of her dresser and her chair. These were familiar things. This was her home, her own.

Unaccountably she shivered. She lowered the shade and held a match to the gasjet.

The room was narrow and bare, but tonight an excitement had come to live in it. Her heart beat with a strong swift throb and she sat in the easy chair to catch her breath. The five pictured faces on the dresser looked at her, and then the tears came. She bowed her head and let them come.

She wept silently. After a while she lay on the bed until the sobbing was done.

She sat up and blew her nose and tidied her hair. In the glass her face was mirrowed, the thin neck and sucked-in jaws; but what were looks to a woman in her fifty-sixth year? (Among first things, she thought, I will have the teeth fixed.)

Her heart was beating easier now and she could face the children without shame. She could even smile at them, the little five of her own.

The pictures had been taken in their younger days, of course. There was Johnny, the first one, photographed when he was fifteen and already earning wages in a Texas lumber mill. He had his father's shock of hair and the bold jaw that bullied a way through night-school for him and made him a lawyer as good as many a rich lad. Working for the government in Washington now, Johnny was, and he'd be a big man some day. . . .

And there was Nora beside him, pretty even in gingham and pigtails and leaning against a slattern fence. She always kept her face clean, Nora did, and stuck up her nose at the farm boys and railroaders. She would marry a fine rich man, she used to say; and so she did. Little Nora—and now she had the two sweet babies of her own.

There were William and Annie and little Frank, born with his father already dead. Yes, it was hard for a woman alone, bitter hard, but you did what you could and thanked God for small blessings. You worked and you begged and you managed to live, and they kept you so busy you had no time for loneliness and the great deep sorrows.

But all that was yesterday. Now there was tomorrow.

She sat and thought and the calm of decision came. She knew what she would do and her mind would plan the details while she slept.

Beneath the bed was a brown tin trunk she dragged out, and she touched the folded dresses with thoughtful fingers. There were papers bound with ribbon and she found the needed ones. She washed her face at the spigot outside and did not forget to wind the alarm.

She expected to roll and toss, sleepless, but the dreams were swift to come.

WHEN Thomas Harwood came to his office at ten next morning he found Mrs. O'Leary in the anteroom. "I've made up my mind," she said. "I am going to take the money, young man."

Harwood smiled. "You're a very important woman this morning. My secretary reports that Mr. Pierre has been calling here for you, apparently not knowing your home address. And some newspapers are anxious to talk to you too."

"Oh my!" She glanced at her companion. "This is my friend, Mrs. Dysart. She's blind. I tried to tell her

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what happened and couldn't find the words for it. Will you explain it, young man, and tell her it's true. A thousand dollars every Thursday!"

"With pleasure," said Harwood. "My office is over here."

A secret gaiety seemed to possess the two as they sat beside Harwood's desk. Occasionally they would touch hands or make some soft exclamation. By some deep understanding the blind woman was able to sense the moment of Mrs. O'Leary's smiles and match them with her own.

"I brought the papers," said Mrs. O'Leary. "There was no will but here is the letter the company wrote when they sent a check for his last wages. Here's the marriage ceritficate"—she held out her hand—"and the ring on my finger which has never been off since the day he put it there. The date and initials are on the inside of it."

Harwood's throat was dry. He coughed. "Exactly what we needed," he said. "Now if you'll sign here, and here—"

She signed with a steady hand. When he gave her the checks she passed them to Mrs. Dysart so that the blind woman could feel the enstamped amount. "You see?" she said. "Each for a thousand dollars and more will come."

"What are you going to do with all this money, Mrs. O'Leary?" Harwood asked. "Is there someone to advise you? Have you any plans?"

"Oh yes," she said, "I've made my plans. And I want you to help me, young man. First I want to get the money for one of these checks—a thousand dollars."

"I'll send a girl straight to the bank."

"And then—well, I'm going to have a party."

Harwood laughed. "You'd better prepare yourself for quite a party with the reporters and photographers too. What shall I tell them? And what about Mr. Pierre?"

She nodded. "Mrs. Dysart and I had thought of that. We thought you could telephone Mr. Pierre and say I won't be back to work. Tell him Mrs. Choizzi has a sister wanting a job. About the newspapers—"

"She doesn't want to bother with the newspapers until the night of the party," Mrs. Dysart said. "The young man can arrange it, Julia. You tell them whatever they ought to know, young man."

"If you please," said Mrs. O'Leary. "Do you think they will write about it out in Kansas even? Some friends I had there, ones I used to know, I let them think I lived at the hotel instead of worked there. But I guess it doesn't matter."

Mrs. Dysart patted her hand.

"ABOUT the party, Mr. Harwood," she went on, "there's the big banquet room on the third floor. Mr. Pierre is very strict, I know, but I'm willing to pay—"

"Nonsense," Harwood said. "Mr. Pierre would probably be happy to pay you for the publicity. When do you want it?"

She glanced at her friend. "Two nights from tonight. Why yes, that's Thursday. There will be twenty-four to dinner, and music, and we'll have some wines to drink. Mr. Pierre will know the right thing to do."

"The surprise," warned Mrs. Dysart. "Don't forget the surprise."

"Oh yes. It's to be a sort of surprise party, you see." She took a folded paper from her bag and placed it on the desk. "I have been living apart

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from my children these past few years and I thought you might write to them —as a lawyer, say—and explain my good fortune. You could ask them to the party and—well, it would be a fine surprise for us all. I'd like to do it that way. The addresses of them all are here, and none lives so far away."

"I'd be delighted," said Harwood. He received the banknotes from his secretary and presented them. "Now what else can I do for my newest client?"

"You might ask that pleasant young lady to come to my party," Mrs. O'Leary said, "and bring her along yourself."

"Why—uh—yes, certainly. I'd be very happy."

. . . Thomas Harwood still sat smiling five minutes after they had gone. The room was pleasant and spring was not so far away. Nor was this terrestrial sphere, its dictators and demagogues notwithstanding, the worst of all possible worlds.

He lifted his telephone. "An outside wire, please. . . . Hello, operator . . . ." He gave a Long Island number and whistled a tuneless reprise along the singing wire.

Even the fact that there were two butlers and countless maids and footmen and chauffeurs to answer the call did not diminish the enthusiasm with which he said, "Miss Galway, if you please. Say that X9 is calling."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"X—like in ham-and-ex. Nine like in the Supreme Court. X9."

"Hello Susan," he said boldly when her voice came on. "This is Thomas Harwood."

"It's a lie," she replied. "Thomas Harwood is a sour young octogenarian who wears dark glasses and croaks like a frog."

He laughed. "No, really. I just wanted to ask—that is, are you going to be busy Thursday night?"

There was a pause. "Hello—" he called. "Hello—"

"It's all right," she said. "They've managed to revive me now. I'm still a bit groggy but I'll be home as soon as I've made the rounds of the night clubs, Mom. Did you actually ask me to go out with you or was it just a dream of far Cathay where the samisen softly strums?"

"It's Thursday night," he explained. "Mrs. O'Leary is having a party, a celebration at the LeGrande. She said she'd like to have that charming young lady come."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," she said. "Mrs. O'Leary's debut—of course I'll be there."

He hesitated. "I don't happen to have a car," he said, "but I could come out and—"

"Nuts," said Susan. "I'll meet you at the Penn Station, seven-thirty. You'll know me by the wild red rose in my hair and the palpitation of my girlish heart."

CHAPTER V

O'LEARY RIDES AGAIN

THE publicity was a disappointment to Mr. Pierre. The *Times* and J. G. Galway's *Mercury* snooted the whole affair, and the few reporters who showed up got no farther than Harwood.

"I've prepared a statement of the details," Harwood told them. "I'll send copies from my office."

They grimaced simultaneously and abandoned him. Susan nudged his arm. "Look—we're being paged."

The Russo-Hibernian doorman, definitely Dublinesque now in his neat

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blue mufti, was signaling mysteriously. "Upstairs," he confided. "She wants to see you. Are they all here?"

"Mr. Pierre has gathered them in the lounge," Harwood said. "I had three telephone calls this afternoon advising me that I would not find it easy to cheat an old lady of her money. A wire from Mr. John O'Leary of Washington threatened a writ unless I instantly revealed his mother's whereabouts."

They passed the third-floor doorway where a banquet table gleamed with silver pomp, and in a reception room beyond they found two excited ladies in evening finery. Mrs. Dysart sat near a window with white hair piled in a court coiffure and a gentle smile that would not be erased. Julia O'Leary, in a gown of silver and black, stood up to greet them.

"Am I all right?" she asked. "Am I good enough?"

"You're beautiful, Mrs. O'Leary," Susan said. "You're the good queen straight out of the fairy books."

She was beautiful, Thomas Harwood thought, with the blessed beauty of content and happiness. The lines in her face had softened somehow and she had attained a simple dignity that matched the unmasked pleasure in her eyes.

"Will you ask them to come up then, Mr. Dunlevy?" she said to the doorman. "Tell them I'm ready now. I'd like for you and the young lady to stay, Mr. Harwood," she went on. "You could be over there with Mrs. Dysart."

"The chair, Julia," said the blind woman. "Remember the chair."

There was a chair with a tall carved back and Harwood placed it as directed. Julia O'Leary took her seat facing the open doorway and adjusted the fold of her skirt. Susan could not see her face now but she marked the flutter of a thin hand and the nervous movements of her throat.

"This way," called the suave voice of Mr. Pierre. "Right here if you please."

The faces in the entrance were a blur to Susan in that first moment. There was a brief hush that caught up your breath and gave your heart a solemn thump. Then Julia O'Leary was standing, holding out her hands, and all the voices began to speak together. Susan blinked vigorously and loved Mrs. O'Leary the more for her unashamed tears.

The big fellow with the orator's waistline would be John from Washington, she thought, recalling Harwood's talk of them. Nora was the one with the smart furs and the bright blue eyes of her mother may have had when she was younger. Annie was hugging Mrs. O'Leary tight and the other two sons were like twins as they laughed. It was a strong, clean, healthy family Mrs. O'Leary had raised and she deserved this hour of exultation in them.

"Hold it!" came the order.

Susan retired inconspicuously as the photofloods exploded silver lightning and the photographers issued calm commands. They ignored John O'Leary's protests that this was no sideshow, said "Thank you, folks," and went on their way with Mr. Pierre birddogging behind them.

"CLOSE the door, Willie," said Mrs. O'Leary. "Let us have a minute alone." She interpreted Nora's glance. "That's Mrs. Dysart, my friend who is blind, with my lawyer, Mr. Harwood and his young lady."

"Oh so you're Harwood, eh?" John

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O'Leary said. "I want you to know, my friend that I'm a lawyer myself and that my mother's interests—"

"Hush, John," his mother ordered, "and find a chair for yourself." She sat and looked around at them with the wet tears still bright in her eyes. She kept her voice soft, curbing her excitement so that it was heard only in the little lift of breath at the end of a sentence. She punctuated with her gentle smile.

"There's a table set for dinner in the other room," she said. "There'll be music and some wine to drink to my good fortune. But I wanted to talk to children first and plan what should be done. All this money at once"—she laughed—"for a woman with none before—"

John joined her laughter. He was as big a man as his father now and his bold jaw was not afraid of anything. "Don't worry your head about that, Mother," he said, smiling to the others. "We all had a chat about things today and we'll easily straighten 'em out. Let me talk it over with your Mr. Harwood. There must be a matter of principal amounting to several hundred thousand—"

"At least four hundred thousand," said William, who was cashier in a fine little bank.

"We'll sue for immediate payment, if a suit's necessary," John went on. "We'll see that it's put into hands you can trust. Willie, here, will know what good solid bonds you can buy."

"How's the children, Nora?" Mrs. O'Leary asked. "You didn't bring them along, of course?"

"Not all the way from Jersey, darling." Nora smiled the smile she used to have for men who drove their own big autos. "But Herb's downstairs waiting and we're going to drive you over for a good rest in Plainfield. They've grown so much, the little imps, you'd hardly know them."

"Is Herbert still in the building business? Is he doing well?"

Nora shrugged.

"Oh, this recession you know. But he has a lot of plans. There's a subdivision—"

"I'm taking the rest of the week-end off and going over with you, Mom," Annie announced. "I arranged with the store this morning."

Annie would never be as pretty as her sister, nor as smart, but she was an assistant buyer already at thirty-two and was always studying books on design and advertising and interior decoration.

"Have you and that young man saved the money for your house and honeymoon yet?"

Annie had a generous laugh. "Not yet, but we only need a few more thousand."

Mrs. O'Leary turned to her youngest son. He was the smallest and weakest of them, less than six pounds at birth, and her tenderness had been chiefly for him in those hard ugly days. There was milk she had forced the older ones to steal and the pans of coal they took by night with the railroad police no wiser.

She said, "They tell me you're an accountant now, Frankie, full fledged. Do you like your work?"

"Sure, sure." He had always been the shyest one. "I guess I'm doing all right. I may even have a chance to buy into the firm one of these days."

Susan had a glimpse of Mrs. O'Leary's face that turned for an instant towards Mrs. Dysart. She heard the blind woman murmur, as if a question had been spoken, "It's all right, Julia, go on."

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THOMAS HARWOOD was standing beside Susan's chair and her shoulder was touching against his arm, she realized, with a warm comfort she did not wish to disturb.

For the last few moments she had been sitting with a certain stiffness, increasingly aware of the odd undercurrent of emotion in the room, She had the fantastic feeling that soundless winds were exerting counter pressures, straining with the laughter of some secret joke they knew.

"None of you can remember your father hardly at all," said Julia O'Leary, "and it's strange that all this good luck should come because of him. He was not a lucky man. Some might say I owe the memory of Blackie O'Leary nothing, but I say let him rest in peace wherever he is.

"Throw off that apron," he said to me, "and bid this hash-house farewell." He gave me his name to bear and his house to keep and his children to raise and what happened was not his blame. I had the joy as well as the pain of it."

"But darling," Nora protested—Nora Stramberg now—"we've all forgotten those horrible old times."

John O'Leary raised a chuckle. "A little adversity's good for the—"

"Let me talk," the mother said. "Let me have my say. I did what I could. What I had I gave to you an no one knows better it was not enough. You, John, out selling papers at no more than ten, earning a man's wage at fifteen—I'm proud of you for that, John."

"Nora, Willie, Annie—not a lazy bone in one of you. You worked, you had ambitions, for what you wanted you fought. It wasn't easy to bear. You sacrificed things that other children had.

"And it's because of the cold and hunger you knew many a time that I wrapped these special gifts up for you and give them to you now."

There were five flat parcels of varying sizes with silvered paper covering them and tied with silver string. She held them in her lap, smiling.

"This is for John," she said. "It's your picture when you were a boy, John, and we lived in Texarkana beyond the lumber yard. When you run for senator you can print it in the paper to show what a fine sturdy lad you were. Also inside are two letters I wrote you which you marked with your left hand *Not Known at This Address* and had sent back to me. I wasn't begging for money, John, like you may have thought. I only wanted to know how you were.

"And you, Nora," she said quickly, "here's you and your pigtails against a picket fence. It cost me two dollars I couldn't spare to have the photo enlarged. The stub of a ticket you'll find is the one your Herbert bought for me when I ended my first and last brief visit to your home. You had to have the room for a nurse for the children, you'll recall, and anyway I'd be happier in the city where there was so much to see and do. The fifty dollars you gave me is in there too."

She looked at the others. "There's a picture of little Annie with her father's eyes. She won't have to worry any more about old bones cluttering her nice apartment when her young men come to call. And there's William's first communion picture, with his hair slicked down with soap, and your picture, Frankie, in the cassock and surplice I bought. You can show each other the pretty Christmas cards you were good enough to send your mother two years ago. 'Sorry you

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can't be with us,' Willie's says, and you wrote on yours, Frankie, 'Will write soon. Love.' "

HER voice had not risen appreciably since she started to speak but there was a tight-lipped intensity in the final words that left the room breathless.

Nora had risen from her chair and stood furiously silent. John O'Leary, belligerently clamp-jawed, turned to the three outsiders. "It's that shyster!" he cried. "He's been working on her, poisoning her mind against her own folk. Why, damn you, Harwood—"

"Please do," Harwood said in a small choked voice. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure."

"Shut your mouth, John," said Julia O'Leary, not loudly. "You know in your hearts, all of you, whether I've spoken true or not. And I'm not saying that I blame you, either, for doing what you done.

"There was a germ of ambition born in you somehow. You battled for what success you have and you hadn't much to spare on such soft things as love and pity. That I can understand.

"I still have a certain pride in you, but I was not proud to see you coming here tonight with your fingers stretched out for coin God dropped in my lap."

She stood up. "I have made my plans. I am going back; I am going to Valley Falls with my friend Mrs. Dysart. We will have a house there with trees and flowers around it, and a car to drive when we want. As fast as the money comes in we'll find ways to spend it every cent. We'll have parties and picnics and we'll travel the world if that's what we choose. And if some day I can put from my mind the black years when you forgot me I will send for you again. That's all."

She raised her voice. "You can open the doors," she called.

The doors to the banquet hall were pushed inward and they saw a long table set for the feast. Groups of people were waiting there, elderly women in yesterday's styles and men who would have looked more comfortable with pipes in their mouths. They began to laugh and joined in a ragged cheer.

"Julia!" they shouted. "Hurrah for Julia!"

"My party is for the people I work with, plus a store clerk and a policeman or two who are my friends," she said to the O'Leary's. "We'll scrape up an extra chair for you, though, if any of you would be bold enough to come."

They did not answer. They drew together and spoke among themselves.

Julia O'Leary turned away. She held her head high and went over to Mrs. Dysart. The blind woman gripped her hands. "Smile, Julia," she said. "See, like I'm doing—smile!"

"I'm smiling," Mrs. O'Leary said. "Here, feel my lips. I'll never know another sorry day as long as I live. Mr. Harwood, will you ask Mr. Dunlevy there in the door to take Mrs. Dysart's arm. I'll walk along with you and your girl. Oh, and tell them to strike up the music please, and pour some wine for my friends."

. . . The banquet was still going strong at eleven o'clock when Susan and Thomas Harwood made their excuses. The night was clear and not too cold as they walked slowly towards the avenue.

"Sleepy?"

Susan shook her head. "I don't know. I don't know how I feel. I'm all mixed up inside with emotions that don't belong in me. For a solid

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hour there all I wanted to do was cover my face and cry."

On the avenue a bus rumbled by. "Take me for a ride?" she asked.

"No—here, a cab's quicker," he said, and turned in surprise as she jerked her arm away. "Susan—hey, what's wrong?"

She ran with unexpected speed in high heels and swung aboard the bus at the corner just as the lights changed. Harwood chased lamely after her but as his hand grasped for the rear railing she struck it away. "You fool! You dolt!" she cried. "Go away!"

He stood at the curb and watched her climb to the top deck where the riders sat mostly two by two. He hailed a cruising cab.

"Follow that bus," he ordered. "How the devil was I expected to know she was in a romantic mood?"

"Brother," said the driver, "don't ask me. Yet every day you read about guys that go ahead and marry 'em."

ON Saturday morning a dogged message set out in pursuit of Thomas Harwood. It bayed at the door of his apartment, sniffed along the corridors of the Harvard Club, and eventually cornered him, winded and dripping, as he emerged from a plunge in the Winged Foot pool.

"Telephone, Mr. Harwood," said the page. "The extension's over here."

He talked to his secretary who had been forced to stay overtime and was not pleased with him. Still draped in a towel he called Eastern Airlines and demanded information. He dressed hurriedly, and after a moment of thoughtful hesitation sought a secluded booth and phoned Susan Galway.

She said sulkily, "If you try to apologize I'll hang up."

"Okay," he said wearily. "The only point is—"

"It was is if you had been sitting with someone enjoying the Sixth Symphony," she said, "and when the music ended he jumped up with a jitterbug bleat and started to holler 'Oboyoboyoboyoboy!' "

"But I tried to explain—"

"Skip it. Is John O'Leary really going to sue you for undue influence, malfeasance and stealing second with the bases full?"

He grimaced. "So he claims. You saw the statement that the five young O'Learys issued to the press. They have consulted a local attorney who was very brisk on the phone yesterday."

"J. G. is hightly delighted. It's exactly what he wanted, you know. Vile riches arraying a family into armed camps, curdling the milk of mother love, rotting the fabric of Americanism. He's gloating over some of those phrases now."

"What I called about," said Harwood, "is this: I'm flying to Boston this afternoon."

"An old college chum, I suppose. Is she pretty?"

He borrowed a sound from J. G. Galway's vocabulary. "It's young Holdcraft. The Acme located him through the maritime lists, pretty sure they have the right one. Anyway, I'm taking the first available plane."

A silence ensued. He said, "Well?"

"I was thinking," Susan told him. "You could rent a portable victrola and buy some Benny Goodman records. Whiles away the time, you know."

When he had replaced the receiver, glowering, he glanced at his watch. Twenty-six minutes in which to pack his bag. It was then 1:54 oclock p.m.. E.S.T.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Recall to Arms

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Jack in the Box," "Dark Thunder," etc.

In a Riff hill-town Jean Hubert, Legionnaire, learned that men who fight only for their peace live happily. But the Legion trumpets were loud in his memory; and stronger than himself was the summons to a doubtful glory

I

IT WAS cold there in the dawn, and the hobbed boots of the Senegalese riflemen creaked on the frosted ground as they rose to charge. They were panting as they passed the Legion, their faces like strange blue-black masks. Then the seventy-five batteries down below the ridge began to fire, ripping apart the last quiet of the night.

Jean Hubert lay to the extreme right of the Legion line, his platoon motionless in their deployed formation as skirmishers. He could feel the beating passage of the shells on the back of his neck, and then there was the shock of explosion, the spurt of flame.

That barrage was covering the Senegalese all right, he thought, but it wasn't catching the enemy. The Riffi warriors had learned their lesson yesterday, knew enough to withdraw from their positions until the artillery fire stopped. Their tactic was to meet the French troops hand-to-hand.

A sudden, strident yell came from the crest. It was followed by a racket of rifle fire, other yells, and screams. Dounoz, who was Hubert's platoon sergeant, hunched close to him. "The *to-tos* missed it again," he said. "Do we take the machine-guns with us this time?"

"Only the light pieces," Hubert said. "The sun will be up before the colonel decides to send us in. We'll have to hop fast when we go."

They lay waiting for another half an hour. The colonel came right up to the Legion line to make sure of what had happened. He was a husky, bow-legged man named Grellier, and he had done a lot of fighting here in Morocco before he had gone to France in the World War.

"The Senegalese aren't quick enough getting in there," he told Hubert. "Your outfit will have to do the job, Lieutenant."

"Oui, mon Colonel," Hubert said. He was securing his pistol lanyard about his wrist. "But I don't think I'll need artillery support. That's a sign to the Riffi that we're coming."

A slight smile pulled Grellier's face. "You're a lucky lad," he said. "You were young enough to miss the World War and all the chatter about the 'necessity for artillery coöperation.' But those fellows up on the crest are mostly from the Ait-Alal clan. They're tough, and they know how to use their knives. You'll have to break them with a frontal charge."

Hubert nodded. "We'll do that," he said, "if the colonel can send a secondary wave in behind us."

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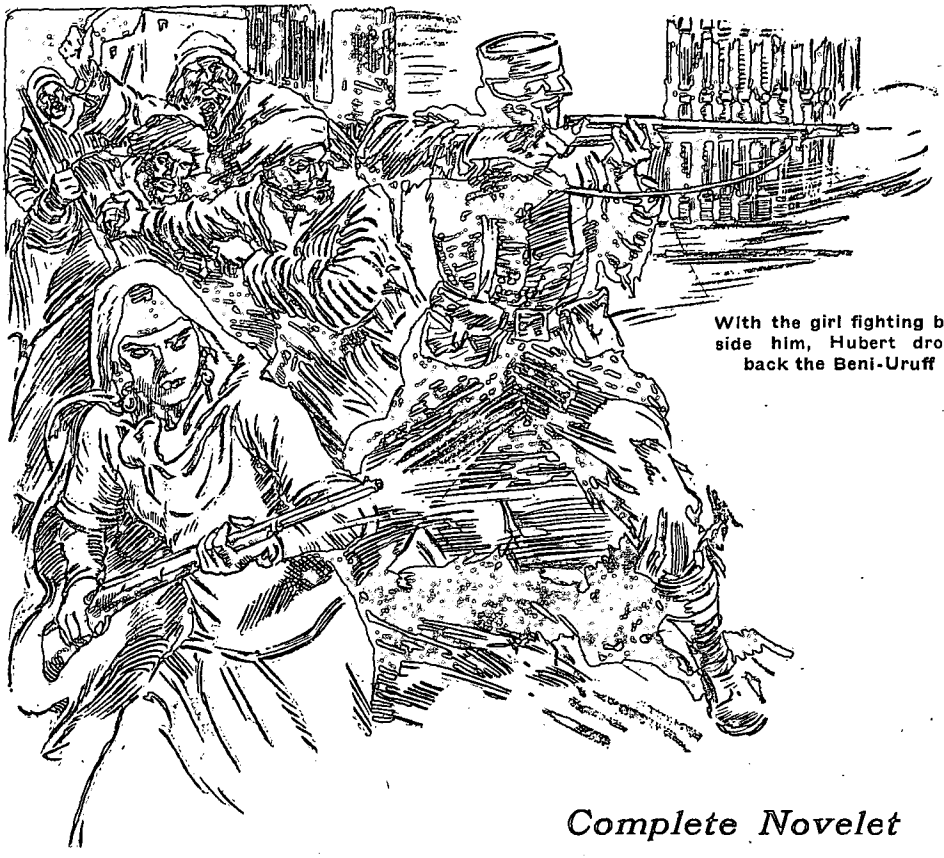

With the girl fighting beside him, Hubert drove back the Beni-Uruff

Complete Novelet

"Trés bien," Grellier said. "Get started, Lieutenant. Good luck."

Hubert took the Legionnaires forward at the double. He kept to the right of the line, gave Dounoz the left. It was very still now; all sounds of fighting had ceased. The men of his command seemed alone in this high, blue mountain world.

Sun had lifted, dissipated the night mists. Ahead, the snowed peaks of the High Atlas range gleamed. An eagle soared down the valley, slowly tilting, and beneath a scrub cedar a partridge chick made a thin-noted peep. It was almost unbelievable, Hubert thought, that men were out here to kill each other on a morning like this. Then he saw the first Senegalese dead, realized how far he had come.

THE black men lay in heaps. Everything had been stripped from them except their red felt caps. Many of them had been killed by the knife, and the wounds showed gaping. Revulsion and anger tightened Hubert's body. This was a cruel enemy, one without mercy.

He raised his right hand in a signal and the men increased their pace. He looked back at them, the yell of *"En avant, la Legion!"* rising in his throat.

Their faces held a set, taut expression, and their eyes were narrowed beneath the cocked kepi brims. It was only when they shouted in answer to his yell that they showed their fury.

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Now they were under fire. Rifle shots were catching them on the left flank, delivered from a clump of live-oaks at the highest part of the crest. The man next to Dounoz went squirming prone, then two more. "Close up, and keep going!" Dounoz grunted.

The slope was very steep, littered with big boulders. It was impossible for the Legion line to keep on unbroken. Hubert cursed in the same tone he would use having lost a trick at bridge. "That *kaid* is a clever lad," he said. "All right, Stoffel, put a burst into the trees up there."

Stoffel's automatic rifle opened with a high clatter. It silenced the rifles among the live-oaks. From there and from further on the left several men ran forth, stooped low. They wore the drab brown robes and yellow turbans of the Riffi clans, their bare legs flashing in the sun. The Legion yelled, swerved toward them.

Hubert's whistle-blast halted and sent prone the Legion. A Mauser bullet had just slapped from the boulder at his side, caught Stoffel through the lungs. Most of the Riffi force was to the right, had lain masked behind the crest. One by one, they were slipping out to meet the Legion.

Hubert laughed at that. They've got the idea, he thought, that we fight as badly close up as the Senegalese. . . . Come on, you bearded sons, and try the prize package.

He carried a grenade sack over his shoulder, and he hurled three bombs in among the bearded men before they were too close. Then he got off his knees, called to the Legion to go in with the bayonet.

Up until that moment he had been quite calm. But the sight of the warriors with their great, curved knives lifted sent an awful thrill of animal hate through him. It was those knives that had mutilated the Senegalese, would do the same thing to him and his men unless he stopped them. He took a tighter grip on his pistol, fired over the boulder into the rushing press of the Riffi.

Men locked, fought and killed all around him. The Legionnaires were completely expert with the bayonet, and they, too, had noticed the Senegalese. They flung the warriors from them, went on and up the slope, separately and in groups of twos and threes, seeking out the men still hidden by the clump of trees.

"Hold up!" Hubert yelled at them. "Move slowly there!"

He had suffered a wrist wound, where a knife point had grazed him, and his pistol was hot. He kicked aside the bodies of the Riffi he had killed, started forward on the full run for the trees.

A greenish darkness held among the tall live-oaks. Rotted leaves and branches were underfoot, and he slipped as he entered there. That saved his life; a massed volley flung over his head.

He heard the Legionnaires die. A gasped groaning sound came from them. Those who lived dragged to him on their elbows, spent, pale with horror. "They got a machine-gun," Dounoz said. "One of the black boys' pieces. *Que c'est marron!*"

"Real cute," Hubert said. He was shaking, but it was with rage. "We can't stay here. We've got to go in, get that gun. Follow me; I think I can do the job with the grenades."

The figures of the Riffi warriors were distorted, made huge by shadow. He was not sure sometimes as he hurled the grenades. But the whip of flame, the cries that followed, told him

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his aim was right. He had one more when he found the machine-gun.

An empty cartridge had jammed the piece, and the warriors were trying to clear it. Maybe eight of them were around the gun. They were bent over it, talking in fast, low voices. "Straighten up!" he called, then let the grenade go.

The gun flung black-whirling in the blast of explosion. Bits of metal and of flesh and cloth showered down over him. "Stay here," he whispered to Dounoz. "I think it's finished, but I want to make certain."

He was crawling flat on his stomach along the edge of the grenade crater when the first seventy-five shell hit. It rocked the trees, made branches snap. But the shells that followed tore the trees right out of the ground, splintered them into smoking ruin.

Jean Hubert stood and screamed, waved his arms as though the battery commander down in the valley could see him. He took half a dozen vague paces before the shell fragment struck his thigh.

He fell backward, dizzy with pain. Blood came thick and hot against his hands, and groping, he fashioned a tourniquet from his shirt to stop the flow. Then he had the sensation that the earth thrust him up toward the swinging sky. He held out his hands to still the earth, and fainted.

THE voices were muted, in a language he didn't understand. It took him quite a time to place them, and to recognize they were in the Riffi dialect.

Two Riffi warriors and a tall native woman were moving through the wreckage of the trees. They were stripping the Legion dead, the woman telling the men what to take. She carried a long knife in her hand, and her actions were deliberate and sure.

She'll be here in a moment, Hubert thought. She'll finish me. He pulled up his pistol, held it with both hands to aim.

She kicked it away with her bare foot. Then she spoke to him in her language, and although he did not grasp the words, he knew that he was not to die, was being taken prisoner.

The warriors made a stretcher of saplings and Legion tunics, rolled him onto it. One of them, a slender, severely crippled man, talked to him in good French. "Don't call out, Lieutenant. Don't try to get away. You'll be killed if you do. It's only by Ageyla's will that you're let live."

"You tell Ageyla—" Hubert began. But the crippled man put a hand over his mouth. "Easy, Lieutenant," he said. "These others would be pleased to kill you."

A loose kind of column of the warriors was forming near the litter. The warriors were loaded with French weapons and equipment. Two of them lugged a Hotchkiss machine-gun, and others had ammunition cases, sacks of hand grenades, cartridge belts.

The woman, Ageyla, led the column, and from one shoulder she had slung the kepi of the captain who had commanded the Senegalese. The strap was loosened so she could use it bucket-fashion. It was filled, Hubert saw, with pistol ammunition, and about her waist were three pistol belts.

An odd desire to laugh came to him. Here was something that would make a magnificent mural painting. The title for it would be "The Undefeated." These mountain people, counting perhaps a hundred riflemen all told, had scored a decisive victory against the French. They had absolutely destroyed

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the Senegalese company, and without doubt he was the sold survivor of his own platoon. Now the Riffi were retiring deeper into the mazes of the far ridges, with no haste and in certain confidence.

"You laugh at us," the crippled man said, "or at yourself?"

"At both," Hubert said. "I'm thinking of my colonel, back there. Why didn't he attack again?"

"He scouted our position twice more, but we drove off his scouts. That and the loss of your command must have convinced him to wait until he had more troops."

"You talk like a trained soldier."

"Every man is a soldier here in the mountains. But I fought three years in the French Army. When I was a boy, I was sent down to school in Fez. I was there in 1914, and a recruiting sergeant got me."

Jean Hubert stared up at him with a keener gaze. "You were in France, then."

Lines drew along the crippled man's jaws. "I was a sergeant in the First Moroccan Rifles. My name is Sidi Ibrim. Your Colonel Grellier knows me. He decorated me with the Médaille Militaire after I got my wound at the Chemin-des-Dames."

"You don't seem to think much of Grellier, or the medal."

"That was your war, not ours. Grellier only gave me the medal to keep me from telling the truth when I returned to Morocco."

"And now you fight the French."

"You're our enemies. You invade our mountains."

"Par exemple!" Hubert said. "You've got a logic all your own."

"I'm the school-master for the clan. The book I teach is the Koran. It is from there I get my logic."

"And this woman, Ageyla?"

"Ageyla was the wife of our *kaid*."

"She's young for a widow."

"Her husband was just killed today. You killed him with one of your grenades. He was among the men working on the machine-gun."

AGEYLA had turned at the sound of her name. She came back along the column with rapid strides. She wore a broad-brimmed felt hat pulled down over a woolen turban, and it nearly hid her eyes. But Hubert was able to distinguish that her features were fine, and small, her face a clear oval, and that she was really quite lovely.

She's a red-head, he thought, and her skin's as white as mine. Way back somewhere, maybe we were cousins. But right about now she's tempted to slit my throat.

Sidi Ibrim expressed that for Ageyla. "She says you must be still," he told Hubert. "A lot of the warriors want to kill you, and will if you don't keep quiet."

Hubert tried to lift up in the litter. "Why is she saving me at all?" he asked.

"Look," Sidi Ibrim said, and pointed to the northern sky. "It will snow tonight. That means the end of the French campaign here for this year of 1924. But our force this summer and fall was made up of several clans. During the winter, they'll go back to their own valleys, gather again when the French return. So we want to be ready, to be sure of ourselves."

Hubert hung with both hands to the frame of the jolting litter. He was being taken into these mountains to serve as a renegade, he realized. The reason for his being kept alive was to teach the clansmen how to use French weapons, to kill his own kind.

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"You might as well do it now," he said to Sidi Ibrim. "Take your knife and cut my throat. I'll never help you fight against my own people."

"Not quite that, Lieutenant," Sidi Ibrim said. "We of the Ait-Alal clan lost too many men today to join in any new general action against the French. All we want to do is protect our own valley if the French try to penetrate there."

Hubert swore at him in a weak voice. "You should be enough of a soldier to lead and train your own clansmen."

"True," Sidi Ibrim said. "I should be. But I got some of the gas in my lungs in France, and my leg bothers me a lot. This is the last time I'll make a campaign with the clan. It is you who must help us. That has already been decided by Ageyla."

Hubert turned to look up at her, found that she watched him with a wide, steady gaze. *"Charmante,"* he said. "Then she'll have to be the one to kill me."

Sidi Ibrim shrugged. "You waste your energy to talk now," he said. "The rest of the trail is very rough until we reach our valley. You'd better rest, or that wound will give you great pain."

Hubert lay back, his teeth closed. There was nothing he could do now, he knew, nothing at all. These people had a power of will that matched his own. Before he could conquer them he must be well again, have strength.

He dozed after a while dulled to stupor by the pain. The men who carried him wearied and were relieved, then relieved by other men. Darkness came as they waded a swift and noisy river, and as they climbed the further bank snow began to fall. He shuddered, moaned half aloud.

A heavy woolen cloak was dropped over him, tucked in about his legs and body. He looked up and saw that it was Ageyla, and that she had given him her own cloak. He wished that he could speak with her, at least thank her. She was a real opponent, he told himself. When the day came for him to face her there would be a fight that would end without truce but with honor. . . .

II

DOGS barked, leaping from side to side around the column. Children ran out in surprise and pleasure as they saw the loot the warriors carried. Women stood in the doorways of the low, clay-walled houses along the little village street, and many of them quietly wept when the column stopped and Sidi Ibrim told the list of those killed in battle.

Then the school-master turned, looked down at Hubert.

"You're to stay at Ageyla's house," he said. "I'll be around to see you in the morning."

Hubert had strength left to say, "I give you my word I'll escape as soon as I can."

"You'll have small chance," Sidi Ibrim said, "as Ageyla's prisoner. I warn you—she is as fierce as any man."

Hubert was reminded of that after he had been carried into the house, put down in a corner of the shadowy room. The warriors left one by one, formally bowing to Ageyla. She stood by the fireplace, the melted snow from her robe making black-shining pools on the floor. When the last of them was gone she stripped off the robe, wore nothing but a thin woolen undergarment.

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She did not seem to be made self-conscious in any way by his presence, Hubert thought. She squatted by the fire and cleaned and oiled with care each weapon she had brought from the fighting. Then she hung them from pegs in the wall, built up the fire and started to make a *cous-cous* of millet and mutton. The rich smell of the cooking permeated the room, and Hubert coughed to show he was still awake.

She came over to him and pulled aside the robes, examined his wound. Her strong hands probed the torn flesh, and then she cleaned and dressed it.

Damn you, Hubert said beneath his breath, you're too calm. You know very well I'm your enemy forever and my one idea is to get out of here.

Some of the emotion he felt must have been evident to her, for she regarded him with a hard and long glance. But she brought him a bowl of the *cous-cous* and a bowl of tea; then she went back to the fire to eat alone.

He kept propped up on an elbow so he could see her. He was becoming fascinated by her, he realized. He had never known another woman at all like her.

Now she sat immobile, staring into the fire. It was made of cedar logs, had burned down quite low in the big chimney. The light from it was roseate and irregular. She had taken off her broad hat and turban. Her hair grew in close curls, was cut short. The fire gave a burnished quality to it, made her eyes appear very dark, her skin very pale.

In the days before his family had decided to send him to Saint Cyr as a military cadet, Hubert had held the idea he might be an artist. The sight of her there in front of the fire, the dark gloom of the room beyond, the strange array of weapons on the wall above, formed for him a perfect composition.

I'd like to paint her, he thought. But there's no glory in this, none of the returned conqueror. This is absolute grief. She's mourning her dead, the man I killed today.

Ageyla had risen. She took a rifle down from the wall, sat again with it across her knees. It was not a French weapon, Hubert saw. It was a Mauser of the type sold by the gun-runners in Spanish territory, and the stock and grip were worked in delicate leaf designs in silver. That had been her husband's, the personal property of the *kaid*.

She caressed it with her long fingers. She pressed her cheek against the stock. Then she stood and returned it to its place. She walked slowly across the room, into the full darkness.

Hubert heard the rustle of robes, the sound of her body being lowered into the position of sleep. But then she began to weep. The sobs came in dull, choked repetition. They kept on for hours, until cocks crowed somewhere in the village and there was the light of dawn under the snow-gusted door.

Hubert lay without moving during those hours. A kind of desperate anxiety filled him. He wanted to get out, away, far from her weeping. You're a soldier, he said to himself over and over. You had to kill that man; he was your enemy. Don't lose your perspective, or your loyalty. You're a Frenchman and an officer of the Legion, and you will be until you die. But her weeping's terrible. If it keeps up, it will make a weak, sentimental slob out of you and you'll be sorry for her and all her people.

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When at last the sobbing stopped he felt intense relief. He found that his nails had been thrust sharply into his palms, and that his hands ached from the rigidity. He pulled the robes up close, dropped into heavy sleep.

SIDI IBRIM awoke him. "Time for the morning meal, Lieutenant," he said. "Then you'll have your first lesson."

"What kind of lesson?" Hubert said, blinking at him.

"You're to learn our language, and at the same time Ageyla's to learn French. She wants to be able to talk fully with you.

"Eighteen men from this clan were killed in action against the French. There's only a few warriors left, and none the right type to serve as *kaid*. It was decided last night in clan council that Ageyla will serve for a time anyhow in her husband's stead. You will help her with your military knowledge, and—"

"I told you yesterday," Hubert said, "that I'll never be a traitor to my people."

Sidi Ibrim shrugged his thin shoulders. "You'll have all winter before you have to make a final decision on that. There won't be any fighting until the snow is gone. But you won't mind being a language pupil of mine?"

"No," Hubert said, and grinned. "I'll be a lot more receptive, though, when I've had a bit to eat."

They sat side by side on the floor for the lesson, Sidi Ibrim in the middle, Ageyla to his right, Hubert to his left. Hubert was not surprised when they began with the nomenclature of the various captured French weapons.

"A school for war," he said to Sidi Ibrim.

"The French have forced us to make war a big part of our lives," the schoolmaster said. But Ageyla was soon finished naming the weapons, and Sidi Ibrim started giving her common phrases.

"You say them, too," he told Hubert. "As Ageyla says the Arabic word first, repeat it after her, and then the French."

Hubert found himself watching Ageyla nearly all the time as the lesson continued. She showed no signs of last night's sorrow. Her face was reposed, her voice level, and she laughed several times at the little jokes Sidi Ibrim made about her or Hubert's pronunciation of the foreign words.

"I wish my regular class could do as well," Sidi Ibrim said. "Now I'm going to leave you. I'll be back tomorrow morning and every morning. But you two should talk together while I'm gone."

"Listen," Hubert snapped at him, "can't I get out of this house at all?"

"Not unless you're given permission by Ageyla," the school-master said. "She's acting as head of the clan now, and orders come from her."

Hubert became really restless that afternoon. He hobbled over to the door, opened it and looked out into the snow-banked street. The air was very cold, glittering in the late sun. On the thatched roofs of the houses scrawny storks squawked, and the village dogs lazily barked back at them. But from the far, high slopes there came the howling of wolves, and the mountains reared sheer in the purple sweep of cloud.

Get over that one range, Hubert told himself, and you're free. French blockhouses are on the next ridge. He lifted a hand against the sun, gazed up at the mountain passes, marking them so that they would be remembered. They

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made an intense and vast appeal to him.

He was aware that he was unshaven, his uniform dirty and bloodstained. You're a prisoner, he thought, you, Jean Roger Hubert. It's been your rotten luck to be captured by a ragglety-taggle lot of semi-barbarians. You can't stay here. You must escape, and fast.

Ageyla was seated by the fireplace, grinding millet with a crude pestle and mortar. "Come in," she said to him in French, using some of the words she had learned that morning. "Shut the door."

Hubert swung around furious with anger. He cursed her, his hands stretched rigid. "Come in," she said again. Beside her was her long knife. She did not touch it, but for part of a second her gaze lowered to it.Hubert came in, and closed the door.

He was calmer after that, kept tight control of his anger. Ageyla was the key to his liberty, he recognized. She was strong, and very clever, but she was a woman, and he was a man. If he were to escape from here, he first would have to get her to trust him. She was his problem, the one person who really kept him prisoner.

III

DURING the following days and weeks he studied her with all the concentration he possessed. He learned her small habits, each detail of her daily routine. When his leg was better and he could walk about, he helped her clean the house, bring in the wood and water.

There were animals in an outbuilding behind the house, a couple of sheep, a cow and a mule. He took charge of them without any word from her, found where their fodder was kept.

She was pleased by his actions, he knew. She had been used to a man around the house, and he was slowly replacing her husband. Since that first night, she had not wept, but many times he had caught her looking at the silver-mounted rifle on the wall. Then one night as supper was finished she started to talk to him.

"Tell me," she said, "about your life before you came to our mountains. Why did a man such as you join the Legion?"

Hubert pitched a fresh log onto the fire, stood with his hands in his tunic pockets. He wasn't a bad-looking man, he told himself, and probably as big and husky as her husband. "You want me to talk in French or in your language?" he asked her.

"In French," she said, and smiled. "I admit that I'm proud that I've learned it."

Hubert took a few paces back and forth past the fire, stopped in front of her. "My people have been soldiers for a long time," he said. "Almost all of the men of the family have served France. Once, long ago, they went to the East in a great religious war, to fight Mohammedans who held what is still called by us the Holy Land.

"Then they fought under a man named Napoleon, went with him to many countries. My father was a soldier, an officer. He was killed in the same war in which Sidi Ibrim fought."

"And you?"

"I was too young for that war. My fighting has all been afterward, here in Africa. I've served in the Saharan territories, in the desert, at Tafilalet, and in the Anti-Atlas range, where the sun hits like a hammer and the tribesmen have skins like leather."

"Those colored ribbons that you

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wear," she said. "Sidi Ibrim came back from his war with one. He said it was for a medal. Are yours also?"

He laughed. "Two of mine are for medals," he said. "The rest are for the campaigns where I've served."

"Then you must be considered a good officer by your people. If you were to command this clan, how would you go about defending the village?"

HUBERT took another turn up and back in front of the fire. Here it is, he thought. Now she trusts you, or she doesn't. You've got her curiosity aroused, and her admiration. Tell her, and you'll go free. What difference does it make? It's a thousand-to-one shot the Legion will ever have to take this place.

He moved close, sat down at her side. "Watch," he said, and with his finger-tip drew a plan of the village in the ash of the hearth. He indicated every house, the threshing-floor and school, even the brooks

"You have that Hotchkiss gun. Emplace it here, by the school, on the highest spot of ground. Then the whole village is covered, and the trail to the north, through the open fields.

"Your riflemen would be placed here and here, behind the walls and among the trees. They'd take care of any enemy trying to attack that way, from the ridge. But if they did get into the village, a squad of six or eight men could drive them out fast with the hand grenades. It's really pretty simple. You should be very safe here, Ageyla."

"Yes," she slowly said. "We should. . ."

They were silent then for a time, a kind of subtle, electric tension between them. She had been patching a tear in her cloak, but she put that down. "Do you still want to escape?"

"I don't know," Hubert said. "I'm not sure. Some days, sight of those mountains almost overcomes me. I think of all my old comrades, of the men who are my friends. I want to get back and find the artillery officer who dumped those shells on my platoon, and bang his jaw.

"But you've been very good to me. You haven't forced me to do anything I didn't wish to do. These last few weeks, you've treated me more as a friend than your prisoner."

"When you first came here I hated you," she said. She sat straight, her hands gathered on her knees. "You killed my husband, a man I loved with all my heart. But then Sidi Ibrim told me to try and treat you like another warrior, a man visiting from some friendly clan. He said hatred would do me no good with you. And that if you were to show us how to protect ourselves, you and I would have to talk in full honesty."

"Sidi Ibrim's not stupid."

"He is very brilliant."

"I've often thought that he was in love with you."

Color rose darkly up Ageyla's throat into her cheeks. "Sidi Ibrim," she said, "has one thought—the survival of our clan."

"I like him for that," Hubert said. "I hope he'll be my friend."

"But you and I?" she said.

She was trembling, he saw. She could not keep her body still. "Ageyla," he said; "Ageyla, I'm in love with you."

He hadn't meant those words. They surprised and shocked him, and yet he knew that they were true.

She stared at him, her lips slightly parted, her eyes wide. She was leaning forward, her arms lifting, and then she stopped herself. "You don't tell me

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that to trick me?" she said. "You talk truth?"

"Yes," he said, "I talk truth." He had brought her to him, was kissing her. "I love you, always shall. . . ."

SIDI IBRIM had fashioned a clever sort of crutch that he used when he walked in the snow. He went a yard or so behind Jean Hubert, carrying his Mauser. "Stop here," he said. "A couple of them are under that tree." He handed Hubert the rifle.

There was a plump partridge hen and two cocks at the base of the cedar. Hubert got the hen and one of the cocks with two shots. It was excellent shooting, and he felt quite elated as he went forward to pick them up. But when he returned, Sidi Ibrim held out his hand for the rifle, looked searchingly into his eyes.

"Ageyla has told me about you," the school-master said. "And I'm pleased, because I think you're a good man. But now that you and she have found your love for each other, will you be true to us, the Ait-Alal?"

"Against any of your enemies except the French," Hubert said. "My loyalty to them must be the same."

"I understand that," Sidi Ibrim said. "I admire you for it. I speak, though, of something else. Fighting has gone on in Spanish Morocco all winter. The tribesmen there have inflicted terrible defeats on the Spanish.

"It's almost spring, and in the lower valleys the snow has started to go. We got word today that the Beni-Uruff, one of the biggest clans on the Spanish side, are coming in here soon to recruit warriors for a new campaign."

"I should think you lads got enough scrapping last summer."

"We did. But the Beni-Uruff are really a tough lot. Their style is to recruit, or raid. If a clan doesn't join them, they loot and kill in retaliation. We want nothing to do with them. They fight for loot, and not from any sense of loyalty to the common cause of the other clans."

"Then they might make trouble for you. You haven't got fifteen men fit to protect the village."

"We realize it. Before you and I came out here, there was a meeting of the clan council. A decision was made to ask you to lead the defense of the village against the Beni-Uruff."

Hubert looked down for a second at the pattern the drip of blood from the partridges made in the snow. "And if I refused?"

"I was given orders to shoot you," Sidi Ibrim said.

Hubert moved his boot across the blood pattern, slurred it over with clean snow. "Ageyla must have been in that council," he said.

"She was," Sidi Ibrim said. "It was she who gave the order for me to shoot you if you failed us. She loves you, but she also loves her clan."

"There's no reason for any such—drastic measures," Hubert said laughing. "I'll lead the clan against the Beni-Uruff when the time comes. Last night, I even gave Ageyla a plan for the defense of the village. I should have been included in your council."

"After this," Sidi Ibrim said," you will be. You'll be considered our senior warrior. It might not be Mohammedan or Christian law, yet in the fashion of us mountain people you and Ageyla are fully married, belong to each other for life. Let me be the first to wish you happiness."

He hunched himself up on the crutch, shyly shook hands.

The gesture touched a cord deep

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in Hubert's nature. This man had never before shaken hands, he thought. It was something he had seen the French do while he served in their army. But Sidi Igrim wished him to realize that now they were comrades, all but brothers.

"Thank you, soldier," Hubert said. "What do you say we take the partridges back to Ageyla? You'll have to stay for supper. She makes a *cous-cous* of which I'm getting proud."

WINDS from the south, then days of sheeting rain brought the spring. Grass began to show through the last snow crust, and leaves came out soft gold-green on the black limbs of the olive trees. The storks were gone north in clacking flight. Boys ran away from Sidi Ibrim's school to chase lambs in the high, distant pastures, to trap trout in the wild water of the brook.

Hubert spent every possible moment with Ageyla, took her with him on his walks to study the trails and the approaches to the village. "Don't worry, *cherie,*" he told her. "We'll handle the Beni-Uruff. They can't take this place. Each man in the village knows his post, and I've drilled them in their jobs until they no longer really need me to lead them."

She tightened her grip on his arm. "You still want to go," she said. "You want to be free to return to the French."

"Of course," he said. "But I realize I'm still held as a prisoner here."

"We need you, Jean," she said. "The Beni-Uruff are well armed. The stories we get are that they've taken a lot of guns from the Spanish. They have already crushed several of the clans over the mountain."

Hubert stood clear from her, scanned the village once more. To his left, just inside the door of Sidi Ibrim's little, one-room schoolhouse, was the Hotchkiss gun. The piece was in perfect shape, and Sidi Ibrim himself was to handle it in case of trouble.

Up the main trail, out among the thick woods, he recognized each vantage point to be occupied by his expert riflemen. His own position was with them, while the rest of the warriors guarded the lower trail where it crossed the brook the other side of the village.

"We've done the best we can," he said to Ageyla. "Now it's up to the Beni-Uruff."

"They'll be here soon," Ageyla said. "I'm glad we're ready."

IV

THE Beni-Uruff came down the mountain into the village one sun-bright day at noon. A warrior among them had a bugle; he blew screeching on it as they advanced. Hubert had been sitting in the schoolhouse while Sidi Ibrim gave the boys the droned lesson from the Koran.

"Chase your lot home, Sidi," Hubert said. "Then we'll go out and meet the visitors. But shut the door tight."

A big man on a pure white stallion led the Beni-Uruff. He wore a Spanish colonel's tasseled field cap and a tunic darkly marked with blood. The fifty or sixty warriors marching at his back were equipped in much the same way. One of them wore an officer's corsets over his *djellaba,* another had silver spurs on his bare heels, and all of them had Spanish rifles, pistols, bandoliers.

"Salaam aliekam," the leader said.

"Salaam aliekam," Sidi Ibrim answered. "It is always pleasant to see friends."

The big Beni-Uruff was staring at

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Hubert. "We're not friends," he said, "with clans who harbor *roumi* spies. I'm Yeihaz, and chief of the Uruff. With Abdel-el-Krim, we've broken three Spanish armies in as many months. What's the *roumi* doing here?"

"He's married to a woman of our clan," Sidi Ibrim said. "You'll dismount and take food with us?"

"I'll dismount," Yeihaz said. "But keep your food. We've got plenty of our own. What we want is men to go with us and fight against the Spanish."

Yeihaz strutted when he got down from the saddle. He carried his Mauser in the crook of his arm, and as he walked the village street more than a dozen of his warriors followed him.

They were a hard-looking oufit, Hubert saw. Some of them stunk of *kif,* and nearly all of them had the scratches of women's nails down their swarthy cheeks.

"They're more a bunch of robbers than soldiers," he told Sidi Ibrim. "I think we're in for a fight all right. But the Hotchkiss and the grenades will straighten them out."

Yeihaz was returning, his glance on the women in the doorways and the few warriors of the Ait-Alal near them. The Ait-Alal stood quietly, their rifles at their sides. "You'd better call you council," he said to Sidi Ibrim. "We'll take every man who can bear arms."

"The council has already met," Sidi Ibrim said. He wore a pistol under his cloak, and his hand was on it. "We have decided that no warriors of ours will leave the village. We suffered very badly last year in the campaign against the French. There's going to be no more war for us."

Yeihaz made a small sound of laughter. He looked aside at Hubert. "You helped them decide that, renegade?"

"No," Hubert said. "But I'm no renegade, and don't forget it. You'd better get out of here, you chicken-stealer. I don't like your looks; I'll change them for you quick."

Yeihaz let the Mauser slide lower along his arm. He widened the stance of his feet, and some of his warriors ran forward to him. But he cursed them away, told them to fall back with the others.

"Y'allah!" he said. "A chief of the Beni-Uruff is called a stealer of chickens by a *roumi.* If I had more time, I'd yank your tongue from your head for that."

HE SWUNG and mounted then, went at the gallop up the street. The other Beni-Uruff straggled after, yowling back epithets, waving their rifles overhead. Yet none of them fired a shot, and they took a faster pace as they climbed the slope in among the first clumps of trees.

"They're not gone for good," Hubert said. "That's just a smart little trick Yeihaz learned from Abd-el-Krim. They'll be back as soon as he's figured out his plan of attack. Get out the machine-gun and set it up at the window facing the slope. Tell the men to take their posts. I'll meet you here when I've talked to Ageyla."

Ageyla was waiting for him at the door of the house. "I was ready to shoot that Beni-Uruff jackal if he stopped to talk to me. But I guess that will be your personal pleasure."

"Merci beaucoup," Hubert said, and swept her up laughing into his arms. Carried her into the house. But he was grave as he put her down, reached for a grenade sack and a pistol belt. "You must stay here, Ageyla. There'll be a

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lot of stray bullets out in the street. Promise me you'll stay inside?"

She regarded him with a wide gaze. "Unless," she said, "I have to give aid to the men at the brook." She lifted the silver-marked Mauser from the wall pegs. "You'll need a rifle. Take this one."

Jean Hubert kissed her. "That was a Riffi warrior's gun. If I carried it, the Beni-Uruff might have reason to call me renegade. I'll use these, the French weapons."

She said nothing, stood immobile as he left the house. You love him, she thought, love him as much as the man who is dead. But he's not completely yours. Somewhere in his heart there is a part that doesn't belong to you and that he'll never let you possess. He thinks of himself yet as your prisoner. You . . . But you can tell him that when the fighting is finished.

A volley made clanging echo up on the slope. Then there were the shouts of running men. She sat down, but she did not shut the door.

Sidi Ibrim waved at Hubert. "All set," he said. "If they get too tough for you to handle up there, let them through to me. I'll pile them up like meat for the butcher."

Hubert ran with long strides, his glance on the slope. "Fine," he said. "But save your ammunition. We haven't got an awful lot."

He was fired on when he left the protection of the schoolhouse. The Mauser bullets tore the air with a sullen whine. "Take care of yourself," he muttered. "Ageyla wants you to come out of this alive."

The Ait-Alal riflemen were well-emplaced among the trees. Their fire area dominated a wide stretch of the trail, and as yet the Beni-Uruff had only rushed once against them. They nodded soberly to Hubert, pointed at the mountainside.

"Machine-gun there," one of them said. "We've heard them hauling it into place."

The Beni-Uruff warrior who worked the machine-gun knew his job. He raked the clump of trees with prolonged bursts, and after one of them his clansmen made another charge. They broke in mass from cover. Yeihaz led them, the tassel of the Spanish cap swinging over his eyes.

Hubert put a pistol shot right below the tassel, but the rest of them came on, and closed with the Ait-Alal. The long knives were out and men fought screaming in individual combat.

"Keep clear! Get back!" Hubert called to the Ait-Alal. He was lobbing hand-grenades into the second wave of the attack. "Let them chase us down to the village."

His grenades had taken a lot of the battle fury out of the Beni-Uruff. A number of them had flung themselves prone, were crawling away to hide behind trees. The men from the village broke free, joined him, and they loped all together down the slope.

Sidi Ibrim grinned, seeing them. "How do you say it?" he asked Hubert. "The first round of this scrap goes to us."

"That's right," Hubert said. "We're lucky so far, we haven't lost a man."

THEN, high on the mountain, the cannon fired. The shell struck on the edge of the threshing-floor, smashed it. The next pair were closer; one of them landed right in the middle of the street.

The Ait-Alal kept silent. They crouched staring at Hubert. "It's a thirty-seven millimeter gun," he said. "A Spanish mountain battery piece

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they must have captured. Yeihaz was smart—a lot more so than I thought. He had that hidden all the time, waiting to blow down the place around our heads."

Sidi Ibrim was the only one to answer. "Don't worry," he said. "This just means that the second round goes to them. The third and last round we'll win."

Hubert had straightened to look out the slitted window that gave onto the slope. The Beni-Uruff tribesmen were advancing, running swiftly between the trees and walls. "We'll have to go out and meet them," he said. "We can't stay here with that gun on us."

He was still speaking as the shell made a direct hit on the wall before him. He was knocked from his feet, almost unconscious. Men staggered, fell over him. There were cries of death agony, the grinding collapse of the stone wall. Sidi Ibrim pulled him clear, lugged him into the street.

"The Hotchkiss is gone," Sidi Ibrim muttered. "Wall dropped on it. But give me your grenade sack. The Beni-Uruff are here."

It seemed to Hubert that it took him many minutes to get to his feet. His vision was vague, and all his motions slow, clumsy. But the yells of the Beni-Uruff came clear to him, and then he saw them. He moved to kill.

They filled the street, hacking with their knives and captured bayonets at the Ait-Alal. He brought his pistol forth, shot three of them before he could get beside Sidi Ibrim.

The school-master was drenched with blood from a shoulder wound. His voice was a thin whine as he tried to shout, but his aim with the grenades was absolutely sure. It was he who had led the defense in that corpse-strewn street.

Only seven of the Ait-Alal warriors were left there. They were being forced to retreat, to give back from house to house. This will be finished soon, Hubert thought. Some of them will get around us, cut off the men guarding the brook. If we had that lot, we might make a stand, and I could go up and get the piece on the mountain.

He was unaware that Ageyla called his name. She was just suddenly at his side, and behind her were the Ait-Alal men from the brook. Ageyla had the silver-mounted rifle. She fired it from the hip, with precision and speed.

Hubert let go a great, roaring shout. He charged forward in stride with her, Sidi Ibrim following him.

The Beni-Uruff turned and ran. It wasn't a retreat any more, Hubert told himself. This was a victory, and Ageyla had won it. She had broken her promise, but by her battle knowledge she had sensed the correct moment to bring in the balance of the Ait-Alal force. A few minutes earlier or later, their presence wouldn't have counted.

He hauled Ageyla back against a house wall, shielded her with his body. "Let the warriors do the rest," he said. "You've done enough."

"How about you?" she said, her eyes a dark blaze in her pale face.

"I'm going up on the mountain for that cannon."

"You can't go alone. You haven't got the strength. Let me go with you."

He nodded, as he would to another man, then took the remaining grenades from Sidi Ibrim.

HASTE drove him and Ageyla up the mountain. A steady barrage was being thrown into the village. They could hear the almost constant crash of explosion as they climbed.

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He fell down several times, weak from the pain of his old wound. Ageyla dragged him upright, supported him. "Not much more," she kept saying.

The cannon was on a shelving ledge of rock at the top of a cliff on the mountainside. Boulders and thick cedar scrub masked it from below. Hubert came in crawling through the scrub, Ageyla carrying the grenade sack for him.

An hysterical pleasure filled the Beni-Uruff who served the cannon. The gunner howled each time he pulled the lanyard, and the other warriors shrilly laughed as the shells hit.

"Take care of the gunner," Hubert whispered to Ageyla. "Make sure of him."

She stood to her full height. The sun burnished her hair and the silver-work of the rifle while she slowly took aim.

The gunner slid down across the cannon. The rest of the Beni-Uruff wheeled staring. Hubert flung his grenade right in among them. When the flicker of the explosion passed, he and Ageyla saw that the gashed stone of the ledge was bare.

Ageyla sat down, and the sound of her breathing was like that of sobs. "It's over," she said. "We've won."

"Yes," he said. "But nearly half the houses in the village are wrecked. A lot of the men are killed, or badly wounded."

"I know," she said. She took his hand. "I'm glad, though, because now there will be peace. Nobody will dare attack the Ait-Alal after this."

"Ageyla," he said, "do you think there'll always be peace?"

"It's my great hope," she said. "You see, Jean Hubert, before next winter, I'm going to be the mother of your child."

He took her tight and kissed her, but there was nothing he knew to say.

V

THE hard work helped Hubert, kept him from thinking. He made no attempt to count the days; he rose with the sun, labored until dark. First, the houses had to be rebuilt, then the crops gathered, the grain threshed and the sheep sheared.

He took his place regularly in the fields and on the threshing-floor beside the others. His uniform was worn out and now he wore the usual dress of the mountains, a rough, short *djellaba* and leather sandals. The villagers considered him one of them, he recognized, and that fact added to his secret doubt and worry about his future.

Then in October the cold winds began booming down the valley. One night as he piled firewood behind the house snow swirled, thick and fast. He shivered, cursed. "No good," he said. "This, I don't like. As long as I had plenty to do, I was all right."

Ageyla bore their child about a month later. He stayed in Sidi Ibrim's house, waiting for the old women to bring the word. "A boy," they told him. "Ageyla says for you to come home."

He slapped Sidi Ibrim on the back. "If this were France—if you and I were in France—we'd go out and get rolling drunk tonight."

Sidi Ibrim's strength had never fully returned since he had been wounded in the fight against the Beni-Uruff. His long, sensitive face had a dull white color, and he coughed a lot. But he smiled at Hubert.

"The best thing for you to do," he said, "is to forget France. Your life is here, with us. You've become one of

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the Ait-Alal. But don't let me keep you. Go to Ageyla."

The women had placed Ageyla near the fire. She lay alone there with the child in her arms when Hubert entered the house. "Look at him," she said.

Hubert felt emotion that choked his throat. He sat down beside her, lightly stroked the fluff-soft hair and the smooth, cold cheek of his son. The child's eyes opened, looked up at him. *"Eh, bien,"* Hubert murmured. *"Eh, bien, mon gars.* You've stolen your mother's eyes."

"Your nose, though, and your shape of head," Ageyla said. "When he is grown, he'll look like you. What name shall we give him, Jean?"

Hubert sat silent for some time. He had acutely feared this moment. Here he must make a decision that would influence his entire life. "A Riffi name," he said: "After all, he was born in the mountains, will be a mountain man."

"Rakeil, that will be his name, then," Ageyla said. "My father was named Rakeil, and he was the *kaid* of the clan. This one will be *kaid* in his turn. You agree?"

It was almost impossible for Hubert to meet her glance. He was possessed by jealousy and doubt, a feeling of absolute hopelessness. Each new link of his life here grew tighter, he knew.

"Fine," Hubert said. "I think Rakeil is a very good name. And he'll surely be the *kaid* of the clan."

THE moments of silence, of strange, strained hesitation, increased between Hubert and Ageyla after that. He spent many hours alone, pondering what he should do. He was a Frenchman, he told himself, an officer who had sworn to be loyal to the Legion. But if he stayed here much longer his loyalty would mean nothing.

Life had caught him in a cruel trap. Love of Ageyla and the birth of their son had made it. His son was to be *kaid* of the clan; he had been unable to deny that to Ageyla. But back in the Legion his old comrades would call him a renegade. Grellier—if he ever saw Grellier again—would list him as a deserter, have him tried before a court-martial.

He kept more and more to himself and away from the village. At dawn he took a rifle and went up the mountain to hunt, stayed all day. It was as he came back one windy dusk that he found the knot of people outside Sidi Ibrim's house.

"A *roumi* is in there with Sidi Ibrim," the people told him. "Some sick and witless man. Belou, the Kabyle trader, came upon him today on the trail from the north. Ibrim is doing what he can for him, for he is very ill."

Hubert pushed past them into the house. The pock-marked little trader, Belou, sat half asleep in a corner. Sidi Ibrim knelt beside the pallet bed, and on the bed was a man who alternately babbled and screamed. Hubert came close, then knelt.

"He's some soldier out of the Legion," Sidi Ibrim said. "See, he still wears khaki, and his collar numerals are of the Third Regiment."

"Yes," Hubert said; "I see—" the man was dying. He had been mutilated, his ears hacked off, and the palms of his hands branded with hot irons. Hubert turned and looked at Belou. "Why did you bring him here?"

The trader shrugged. "He's out of his wits. In another couple of hours, the wolves would have had him. The Koran teaches us that such people should be treated with pity, and you—"

"I used to be in the Legion, too,"

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Hubert said. "Very logical, trader. Now you'll expect my wife to buy your pots and pans."

"But was I to leave him to die?" Belou muttered.

Hubert did not answer. His glance had gone back to the Legionnaire. The man was emerging into consciousness; the pale, misted eyes were clear. The scarred hands twitched.

"I'm Lieutenant Jean Hubert," Hubert said. "I used to serve with your regiment—the Third. Do you remember me, or how you got into these mountains?"

"Not same way you did," the Legionnaire muttered. "I was captured at the Ouergha. Took a whole bunch of us. Ten days to mutilate us, and ten men a day. Put us in a ring, and then—All right. You've seen it, done it. So you know. How do you like being a renegade, Hubert?"

"You're wrong about me," Hubert said. "I'm not that. Tell me about the fighting at the Ouergha. Did they get in the tanks from France? How about the Sherifian Escadrille, and the Malagasy mountain outfits?"

The Legionnaire had reared up nearly erect. "Can't hear you when you talk like that," he said. "Your new folks cut my ears off too short. Just give me a gun, though, Hubert. Give me a gun and I'll fix your ticket home."

"Be quiet," Sidi Ibrim said, and gently held him down against the pallet.

"You a renegade, too?" the Legionnaire said. Then his body slacked and he was dead.

AGEYLA gazed into the fire while she listened. "You mean," she said finally, "that you want to leave here, Jean?"

"I must," Hubert said. "The man I just buried made me realize why I should. You and I both know I'm not a prisoner here any more, and really haven't been for months. I've stayed of my own will, and because we love each other."

"Those have been your only reasons?"

He pointed to the sleeping child. "Rakeil is another. I love him, too. He's part of me, but he belongs much more to you and the clan. He can spend his life here as a mountain man, sure of where he belongs. I can't; I've got to go back to the Legion."

"You're trying to tell me that a man can have but one loyalty. I agree with you. But still I can't quite understand why you think you must go back to the Legion."

"They need me there, Ageyla. The Legion is fighting a very severe campaign. I belong to the Legion, although the soldier who died called me a renegade. And in time, if I stayed here, Rakeil would do the same thing. You see, at heart I'm a Frenchman, will be until I die."

Ageyla bent down and arranged the robes covering the child. When she straightened, there were tears on her cheeks.

"We met in war, you and I," she said. "But we should part in peace—So go back, Jean. Go back to the Legion, where you belong. I hope that will give you happiness, and later, when Rakeil—"

Hubert stood watching her with every muscle taut. You must go now, he thought, right away. Stay a moment more and you'll stay forever. He crossed the room and took down a haversack, filled it with food, put on a sheepskin coat and over it strapped a pistol belt. His hand was on the door latch when he stopped.

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Ageyla had risen, was advancing to him. "Let us part as man and wife," she said. "Let's make believe you're just going away on a journey."

"Oh, my darling!" he said and clasped her tight. It was she who opened the door, thrust him forth.

"You must," she said. "I'd be untrue to myself if I kept you."

Then she shut the door, and he was alone in the snow.

He was approaching the first pass to the north when Sidi Ibrim overtook him. The school-master called his name in a long shout, waved his hand. Hubert halted and waited for him.

"You're leaving us?" Sidi Ibrim asked, a film of sweat glistening on his cheek-bones.

"Ageyla's sent me away. She and I have decided my place is with my own people."

"You're wrong," Sidi Ibrim said. "Stay here, in peace. Now you've lived in our mountains, you'll always want to come back. It's an old saying, soldier, that a man must be true to himself before he can be loyal to others. And you love Ageyla; you love your son. They're the greatest things in your life."

"But they can't be," Hubert said. "*Au revoir*. Take care of yourself."

Sidi Ibrim made no reply. He rested unmoving, hunched on his crutch. The snow caught him, covered him white from head to foot. When Hubert turned on the next ridge and tried to see him, where they had stood together seemed barren, empty.

VI

COLONEL GRELLIER was in command of the Legion base at Meknes. He dismissed his aides and questioned Hubert alone. "You tell a simple story, Lieutenant," he said. "Because of your past record, I'm given to believe you.

"But it would be unwise to assign you to further service here in Morocco for a time. Some of your brother officers might be a bit too curious about your stay in the mountains."

"All I ask," Hubert said, "is to be sent on active duty as soon as possible."

Grellier smiled. "The Legion still has plenty of that to offer. I'll see that you're attached to one of the units going out to Syria. You'll have a very fine chance to get back your soldierly self-respect fighting against the Jebel Druse."

"Thank you, sir," Hubert said.

"Thank the Legion, not me," Grellier said. "It's made you what you are."

The years between that day and the day when he returned to Meknes all seemed very much the same to Hubert. He made conscious effort to fill his thought with the complex detail of military existence, to keep out memory of Ageyla and Rakeil, Sidi Ibrim.

He received his captaincy when the last conquest was made in Syria, was sent home on leave to France, then to Indo-China. There was fighting there as severe as any he had seen in the Syrian desert, and he distinguished himself many times in combat. But during the intervals between campaigns he slipped into the habit of deep, nostalgic remembrance of his life with Ageyla.

He still considered her as his wife, and that he must be true to her. At the officers' parties at Saigon and Pnom-Penh he was uneasy; he stayed away from the women present, often remained solitary at the bar. When his tours of duty took him into the interior, he was happier, for then he could think about her at will.

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The hot, moist nights of the jungle heightened the effects of his reverie. It would be winter now in the High Atlas, he thought. Sidi Ibrim would have his crutch out as he limped down the street to Ageyla's house to give Rakeil his morning lesson.

Rakeil had become quite a big boy, of course, and as tall as Ageyla. Ageyla would sit by the fire as teacher and pupil went over the lesson. She'd smile once in a while as Rakeil made a slip, and the firelight would bring a gleam from her dark gray eyes. The years hadn't touched Ageyla; she was just as beautiful, just as young. . . .

Hubert went to sleep some nights with that vision of Ageyla in his brain. Once, when he had the fever, he thought that she was beside him, at the edge of his bed, and the orderly got frightened, went running for the doctor.

"You've had enough of this," the doctor told him after he had brought him through the fever. "How about a transfer to a colder climate?"

"I like this fine," Hubert said.

"Maybe you do," the doctor said. "But I know you've done ten years straight out here, and before that you served four more in Syria. You're due to get your rank as *commandant* next month, anyhow. A leave should go with that, and you can spend it in France."

Hubert found Paris a city he hardly knew. There were sandbags along the boulevards, and all the shops had their windows taped against bomb concussion, heavy-shaded for a blackout. That was the month of August.

The papers were full of war talk; the people in the cafés discussed reservists just called up and on their way to the Maginot Line. Then it came; Hitler struck Poland.

Hubert reported to the Ministry of War the next morning, was given orders to join the staff of the Third Regiment of the Legion at Meknes.

He crossed to Africa held by a strange mood of apathy. War, he kept telling himself, international war all over again. My father was killed in the last one, and that was supposed to be the end of it.

Grellier was at Meknes, with the gold stars of a general on his sleeves. "Glad to see you," he told Hubert. "You're the kind of man we need. I'm supposed to keep North Morocco safe, but with less than half of my present force. We'll have to recruit new troops. I'm going to ask you to go up in the High Atlas to make levies from among the mountain clans."

Hubert made his voice sound calm. "You couldn't find another man for that job, *mon général?*"

Grellier squinted at him. "Why, you're the best," he said. "I remember very well the last time I saw you here, when you'd just come down from your junket with the Ait-Alal. Go see them first. Have a talk with that woman, Ageyla. The Native Bureau agents tell me she's grooming her son to be *kaid* and run the whole show. You should have some slight personal interest in that."

"Oui, mon général," Hubert said. He could protest, he knew, ask Grellier not to send him. But if he did that Grellier would simply detail another officer to the same mission. It had become his hidden, subconscious desire to see his wife and son once again, and here was his chance. . . .

HE RODE into the mountains with a section of Spahis as guard. The people of the Ait-Alal had not given any trouble in fifteen years, the Spahi sergeant told him, but still believed

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themselves independent, free from French rule.

"Then you keep your outfit here, this side of the brook," Hubert said. "I'll cross over alone. I haven't changed so much the older folks won't recognize me."

He sent the horse slowly through the brook. His emotions were confused; he felt curiosity and doubt, a strange sort of anxiety. But the first people he saw were distant in the pastures, and he kept on right to the door of Ageyla's house.

It was unchanged. None of the village seemed changed. Storks hunched on the house eaves, the threshing-floor was busy, and the scholars droned out the words of the Koran in chorus. He dismounted, knocked on Ageyla's door with the butt of his riding crop.

Sunlight came wide over Ageyla when she opened the door. He thought he could count the seconds while they stared at each other unspeaking. There was a bit of gray in her hair, small lines around her eyes; that was all.

"Jean," she said. "Jean, you've come home."

"Yes," he said. "I guess it is home."

A fire was on the hearth, and she had been preparing a *cous-cous*. "You're hungry?" she said.

"No, thank you," he said. He wanted to touch her hair, her face, take her in his arms, but he rested motionless by the fire.

"It's been a long time," she said.

"Fourteen years," he said. He was looking fully at her. "How's Rakeil? How's Sidi Ibrim?"

"Sidi Ibrim died the night you left. He never came back from up there on the mountain. But Rakeil is fine. He'll be very glad to see you. Tell me of yourself, where you've been, what you've done."

"I've just—been away." He had swung to watch the door.

School was out; the class was coming down the street. Hubert heard the gay, ringing voices, the laughter and the scuffling. Then the group stopped before the house.

Some of the scholars were older than Rakeil. But none of them was taller, any broader in the shoulders. Hubert recognized his son at once. The boy had his features, his cast of head. But his hair was red, Ageyla's red, and as he entered his glance went to his mother.

She took Rakeil by the arm, led him to Hubert. "This is your father," she said. "He has come back to us."

The boy shook hands with a slow, shy gesture. Hubert was reminded of Sidi Ibrim. The school-master had been his true friend, he remembered, and right now he had need of him.

"I don't know how long I can stay," he said to Ageyla and the boy. "I'm still serving in the Legion, here on duty."

"There's going to be war in Africa?" Rakeil said.

Hubert made a gesture. "There's war in Europe. It might spread here." He was silent, hesitant for a moment, forced himself to go on. "I've been sent to the Ait-Alal by my general to recruit men for the French. Regiments are being formed to be used in France."

THE glance exchanged between mother and son was slow, and steady. "You answer him, Rakeil," Ageyla said. "Tell him the decision of the clan."

"We will fight," Rakeil said, "only to defend ourselves. We live in peace, pay no allegiance to the French. But what is this war?"

"It's against Germany," Hubert

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said. "And all France asks from the mountain people is volunteers. Some of your schoolmates, lads a couple of years older than yourself, would make good soldiers. They'd be well paid, returned here to their homes when it's over."

"Sidi Ibrim went to a war like that," the boy said. "I've been told by my mother that he died from what he suffered there."

Hubert felt sweat along his throat. "It won't be like the war in which Sidi Ibrim fought," he said. "We've got great fortifications now, of concrete and steel. Our troops fight there, in what is called the Maginot Line."

Ageyla crossed to him. She stood between Hubert and their son. "This is wrong," she said. "You can't do it. You made your choice here, long ago, and you chose the Legion and what you believed was glory. We want none of that. We have our own lives, and our peace. I must ask you to go."

This was not what he had expected, Hubert thought, not his dream. It had been his idea he could spend weeks and months here in the mountains, coming often to visit Ageyla and the boy. But now he must go. Ageyla wouldn't let him stay. . . .

He turned slightly from her, and in a sudden, swift vision he saw all the French mothers standing with their soldier sons at the Gare Saint Lazare, the Gare du Nord. They had perhaps been proud, those women, but they had wept as they said goodbye. For them, there had been memory of the other war, of the men who hadn't returned from the call to arms.

Ageyla was right, and he was wrong.

He made his farewell to Ageyla then, bent and kissed her hands. She was expressionless. It was only by the rigidity of her hands that he knew she was caught by great emotion.

"You've done well," he murmured to her. "You can be proud. . . ."

Rakeil walked with him down the village street. The boy had taken the silver-mounted rifle from the wall pegs, carried it in the crook of his elbow. "You'll go to fight in the place called the Maginot Line?" he asked.

"Yes," Hubert said. "I'm going to ask that I be sent there." He took Rakeil close, kissed him on the cheek.

"Then take this, father," Rakeil said, and held out the rifle to him.

"It belongs to you," Hubert said. "You're to be *kaid,* you'll lead the clan. They'll have other guns for me."

He did not look back as he started toward the brook. His eyes were filled with tears.

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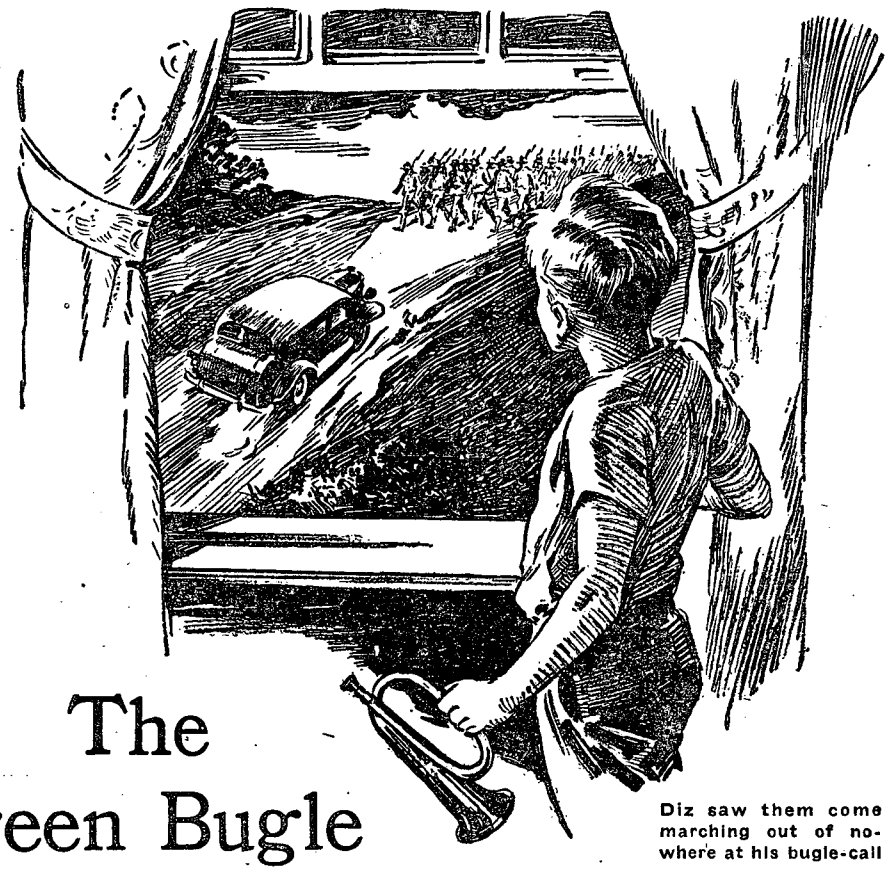

Diz saw them come marching out of nowhere at his bugle-call

The Green Bugle

Presenting Aunt Jessie, the Reb: She was a-scared of nothing, not even Yankee blacksnakes, because one blast on her ancient bugle would summon a hundred Dixieland ghosts

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "Till Doomsday," "No Patriot There," etc.

WHEN they reached the depot in Gettysburg, Aleck parked the station wagon by the platform and began to feel a mild elation, for his hopes were high. Contrarily, in the back of the car, the Stuart boys, Tiny and Desmond, could not hide the expression of subdued dread in their eyes.

It was three days since their father had taken his sudden departure for Los Angeles; in that brief time the boys had gained complete control of the Stuart farm and turned poor Aleck into a nervous shambles. They had not held a club over his terrified black head—only a sinewy blacksnake which Dez carried with him in a small canvas bag. The

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only thing Aleck hated worse than a snake was two snakes.

Only that morning, Aleck had whispered carefully to the cook, "Emmaline, th' day o' salvation is at hand. Th' Lawd is sendin' Aunt Jessie Micawber t'take care o' them assassigns, and Mistuh Stoot, he done said she was a tow'rin' pillar o' strength!"

Emmaline shook her head dismally. "Ain't a woman bawn in dis yere wo'ld yet what kin take keer them two horrors."

But Aleck's hopes were up and he refused to be discouraged. He was following a star. A large star, Mr. Stuart had warned him previously. "She's the biggest woman in the world, Aleck, and you'll know her at once because she'll look like something out of a local circus."

Mr. Stuart was right. The train had halted, wheezing wearily, and in the rear of the station wagon, the boys watched with wary curiosity, Dez even dropping the blacksnake in the bag to the car floor. The Pullman opposite the car began, suddenly, to disgorge baggage and human beings.

They all became aware of Aunt Jessie's presence when a porter stepped to the platform carrying two monstrous, garish carpet-bags, remnants of a faded and tragic era. Aunt Jessie followed right on the porter's heels, plainly distrusting him. She moved ponderously, with great care, frowning; and in her right hand she carried the green bugle, in her left, the large cage containing a contemptuous red and yellow macaw who ignored the world around him. With fine disdain he sat upon the crossbar and preened himself.

"Well, spit in the eye of a matin' mink," Tiny said, having heard one of the old-timers at the general store in Pine Hill say something similar. "What's she got in her hand there?"

Desmond Stuart looked at his younger brother with a frown, afraid that Tiny was impressed. "It's only a bugle," he said.

"But, Dez, a green bugle!"

"Ain't a green bugle," Dez snapped. "Only an old bugle that's all moldy. That green ain't nothin' but mold, that's all. What's so somethin' about an ole bugle like that?"

"I never blowed a bugle," Tiny said.

"Tiny, you ain't gonter *like* her, are you?"

Tiny did not answer, nor did Dez expect him to, for by then Aleck was scrambling out of the car toward the platform to superintend the removal of her luggage into the station wagon. As for Aunt Jessie Micawber herself, well, there she was in the flesh, real and formidable and no longer a name to be whispered across the room at night and to be linked to horrid plans of attack that would put her under the boys' collective thumb.

Dez, being older, still had hopes, but Tiny gave it up at once. That old woman, she wouldn't go under his thumb. She wouldn't go under the thumb of the Statue o' Liberty.

It was the middle of June and Pennsylvania had stumbled, depressed and panting, through a dry heat spell which had lasted a week and a half. You would have thought that Aunt Jessie, having come all the way from South Carolina where it's mighty hot most of the time, wouldn't have minded this Yankee heat so much. But she did, and it made her look savage.

SHE was sixty-nine and her face, no longer possessing resiliency, drooped badly at all points. Its coarsened skin and sagging jowls were scarlet from the heat. There was a brooch of sweat

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beads on her upper lip where, at the corners of her mouth, she had quite a tangible mustache.

From her abrupt nose a pair of deep, hard trenches dropped down to a full inch below her mouth. Under her lower lip, port-side, there was a large brown mole from which a tuft of long white hairs stuck up like fine wire. Her hat was of straw, high, broad-brimmed, of archaic magnificence, held into place by a sinister hatpin a trifle longer than a bayonet.

Her gray hair was combed straight back, with no attempt at beauty, and it ended, in the back, in a round firm bun, crocheted with hairpins.

Even Dez shivered. She sure looked like a lot of Aunt Jessie. Yes, she could have made two Aunt Jessies. Something told Dez that he and Tiny were back in the groove once more, their escape from routine and discipline cut short at its peak.

Neither of the two boys had ever seen Jessie Micawber before. They had heard their dad speak of her as the only living relative they had. Actually she was their great-aunt, the sister of their paternal grandmother whom they had never seen, she having died before they were born.

Once before when Mr. Stuart had gone off, they had been left behind. That time he had hired a nurse who later sued him for damages. This time, he thought of Aunt Jessie. Trip would do her good. Change of scene. Getting old, too; seemed right the boys should see their only relative.

Aleck got the carpet-bags and dropped them heavily into the rear of the car while the boys clambered out and stood stock-still, Dez with his hands behind his back, holding the canvas bag in them. The carpet-bags clumped down.

"Here now niggah!" Aunt Jessie said in a voice of growling thunder. "Careful how you drop them bags. You treat my things gentle or I'll have the hide o' you, hear me?"

"My name," Aleck gulped, in an attempt to establish dignified relations between himself and his new mistress, "is Aleck. I'm Mistuh Stoot's chauff'r. Me and Emmaline, she th' cook, we in service at th' farm."

"Would have thought," Aunt Jessie growled, "that John could've got a healthier lookin' slave than a will-o-the-wisp like you."

"Beggin' you' pahdon, ma'm," Aleck said weakly. "Mistuh Lincoln, he freed th' slaves back in '61. I is a free man. I ain't no slave, ma'm. I get fifty bucks a month. That war, ma'm, she's ovah."

"Is she?" Aunt Jessie said, fixing him with a cold stare. "Well, she may be over to you, but *I* didn't sign no peace treaty! Hear me?"

"Yes'm," Aleck sighed, lost.

She moved over to the station wagon and stuck the cage with the macaw inside and laid the bugle on one of the seats. Then she looked at the boys. She pointed an awesome finger at Dez. "You're Desmond. How old?"

"Twelve, Aunt Jessie."

"Umph! Been behavin'?"

"Yes, ma'm. Oh yes."

"That's a lie. You been runnin' wild. It's all over your face. But I'll fix that, hear me? John Stuart's probably got you spoiled to death, but I'll fix it, and it won't take no horsewhuppin' either. You John Jr?"

"Tiny," said Tiny. "I'm nine, Aunt Jessie. And I gotta c'lleckshun of wild an'mals—"

"Didn't ask you," she snapped. "Mind your manners, boy. Speak when spoken to. Or I'll blow the bugle. Quick now, into the car, and you, niggah, you drive

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this contraption careful or you'll feel th' back o' my hand, hear me?"

They had scarcely reached the dirt road on the way back to the farm, with Aleck grimly thinking that Jessie Micawber was a little more of a towering woman than he personally cared for, when the boys in the back seat started whispering.

Tiny: "What'd she mean 'bout blowin' that horn?"

Desmond: "Dunno. It's just an ole bugle. She made it sound like somethin' turrible would happen."

Tiny: "She's just tryin' t'scare us."

Desmond: "Thinks she's smart. I'll show her th' snake. Just polite-like, I'll show it t'her. Chuck a chipmunk, I'll bet it'll make her eyes pop out'n the floor."

Aunt Jessie turned her broad shoulders in the seat ahead and her cool blue eyes, undimmed and clear, although there was a faint cast to the right eye, surveyed them critically. "What mischief you boys up to now? Boys, they never whisper 'less there's mischief brewin'."

"We just wanted to show you somethin'," Dez said, with a fine malicious gleam in his eyes. He raised the canvas bag and opened it. "We just wanted to show you *this!*"

ALECK saw it coming in the rear-vision mirror and he yelped a warning, but Dez had grasped the blacksnake and hoisted the reptile out of the bag. He waved it under Aunt Jessie's nose even closer than he had dared to think he would, and he grinned from ear to ear as he watched her, waiting for her to scream and hide her face in her hands the way Emmaline did and the schoolteacher, Miss Griggs, did.

Aunt Jessie looked singularly unimpressed. "Huh," she said. She reached out and took the snake from his hand, grasped it expertly behind the head and at the tail. She stretched it out in mid-air. She shook her head.

"Well," said she, "it's a mighty sorry specimen. If this is the best a Yankee snake can do, I feel right sorry for 'em. Why this piece o' snakemeat ain't more'n four five feet long. Why, down in Wake Hill in Car'lina where I live, we find 'em this long in th' litters. He ain't bigger'n a baby serpent. Down south, we got racers ten feet long that'll choke th' life outa a rattler in ten seconds flat."

She dropped him into the bag with a gesture of disgust. "Not a sign o' gumption in the poor critter. That snake'd be scared to bite a worm."

Tiny and Dez were stunned, so completely abashed that they could not hide it in their faces. Aunt Jessie was no fool. She looked at them and then she smiled grimly. "Hah! See it now! Tryin' to scare an old lady, eh? A nice pair o' gentlemen, you! Thinkin' a poor starvin' snake could scare th' daylights outa your poor old Aunt Jessie!"

"You ain't afraid o' snakes," Dez said, openly let down.

"Ha!" she chuckled, smacking her mouth. "Ain't afraid o' anythin', includin' snakes and turtles and bullfrogs and thousand-leggers and bees and lizards! Ha, I guess we understand each other, boys. You'll be mindin' your p's and q's, I've a mind, or you'll get what for. I'm talkin'."

Tiny and Dez regarded each other with silent despair. She was quite right, and they knew it. They all understood each other. But she understood a little bit too well. They sighed.

MR. JONATHAN of Twin Acres came over that first afternoon. The boys had gone down to the swimming

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hole with Aleck and Aunt Jessie responded to Emmaline's, "Visitor fo' yo', Miz M'cawber!" by coming downstairs with unladylike haste and rushing to the door to exclaim, "Sheriff, eh? What've those two boys got into now?"

"Shucks, ma'm," , Mr. Jonathan laughed. "I'm not the sheriff. And I reckon them two boys have gotten into nothing more than the swimming hole down by Long Creek. I saw them going over with Aleck earlier. They went by my house. I'm your closest neighbor, ma'm."

"Oh," Aunt Jessie said, and added warmly, "Oh, that's different, Mr. Jonathan. Come right in heah and make yourself to home. It's right kindly o' you to come right over the first day to say hello to an old woman like me. Real neighborly, it is. Didn't expect it up heah in Yankee country."

Jonathan laughed. He had a deep rich voice, and he was a rugged specimen, around forty-five, with a healthy brown mustache on his upper lip. "Well, ma'm, me and Mr. Stuart've been neighbors now for nearly five years, and good friends in the bargain. He asked me to kind of keep an eye on the boys till you got here, and then he asked me to keep an eye on *you* and the boys after you got here."

Aunt Jessie smiled coldly. "I 'ppreciate your kindness, Mr. Jonathan," she said, "but I reckon I can well keep an eye out myself. I ain't exactly puny."

"I didn't mean exactly that, Miss Micawber," Jonathan said, and his face grew serious. "You don't understand. You see, we have a little situation here that is not pleasant. And, in a manner of speaking, it constitutes a threat to the boys, Desmond and Tiny."

"What's this?" Aunt Jessie rumbled. "John Stuart didn't tell me about no threatenin' situation when he telephoned me down in Carolina. He just said as how he was goin' west on a writin' job and that I should be takin' ovuh the care and feedin' o' his youngsters."

"Yes, I know," said Jonathan. "He didn't want to frighten you. But the facts are there just the same. You see, Miss Micawber, I used to have a man working for me at Twin Acres, his name was Herman Mantz.

"He was kind of a simple-minded soul—I guess every community has got one—and Mr. Stuart caught him over here one day. He broke into the house and was lifting everything in sight when he was nabbed red-handed. I used to wonder how Herman got so much extra money. He'd been stealing it."

"I declare!" Aunt Jessie rumbled.

"Of course," said Jonathan, "when he told me, I handed Herman over to the sheriff, and fired him off the job. This was all about two weeks ago. When time came to press the charges, Mr. Stuart wouldn't do it; he had begun to feel sorry for poor Mantz then, but Herman Mantz wasn't feeling sorry.

"He had a one-track mind and he made a lot of threats. He said he would get even with Mr. Stuart and that he'd take those boys down to the creek one night and drown 'em like kittens."

"You mean he said them kind o' things in the presence o' witnesses and all?" Aunt Jessie said.

"But that wouldn't mean anything to Herman Mantz," said Jonathan. "He's a little simple-minded, as I say, and he might have only one hope of revenge. Anyway, we figured not to take any chances. So I've been living pretty close to this place and keeping a weather eye peeled. And I wanted you to know the story so that you could

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keep a weather eye peeled yourself. If you see a strange man hanging around at all, you get in touch with me right away. Send Aleck or some one over."

"Ain't there no telephone heah?" Aunt Jessie growled.

"No. You see, John Stuart came down here to get away from telephones and he never installed one in the house. He didn't want to be bothered. That is what bothered me a lot lately. There wasn't any way for this house to get in touch with me in a hurry, if I was needed. And there still isn't any way. Some one would have to do some fancy running down to my place. And if anything happened, it would happen too fast."

"Wait heah," said Aunt Jessie, and she disappeared to come back abruptly with the green and moldy bugle in her right hand. "You see this bugle, Mr. Jonathan," she said. "Well, this heah bugle is just as good a telephone as can be found. Down wheah I come from, in Wake Hill, Car'lina, we don't have no telephone atall.

"Everybody got a bugle. And if'n somethin' happens on one farm and they need help, they just bugle, day or night, t' the next farm and we send help a-runnin'. Why, I recollect one night when a crazy bobcat got in my house, and there I was without a shotgun or any arms so I gave a toot on my bugle and Leff Carruthers came runnin' over from his farm and destroyed the beast. Reckon we could use that heah?"

"Why certainly!" Jonathan said. "And it's a fine idea. If you see anyone hanging around here, you just give a blast on that bugle. You blow *Charge,* and I'll come running over with some help. Why, I could get here in two or three minutes, running hard."

"Ain't you ownin' a car?"

"Of course! Never thought of it. Then that's settled, and a weight is off my mind. You blow the bugle and I'll drive right over."

"And now if you'll excuse me, Mr. Jonathan," said Aunt Jessie, "I see my boys comin' home and I got work to do on 'em."

As for Dez and Tiny, they too had ideas. They had work to do on her.

THEY gave her another test that night. They both decided that they had been nice little gentlemen long enough, and, as Dez put it to his younger brother, "We ain't gonna give up without a battle. That's what Dad said when they tried to raise taxes here or somethin'."

Tiny was dubious. At nine, one is apt to be sensitive about spankings. "You don' think she'd lick us, Dez?"

"Not this first time," Dez said. "We got to try her again. If'n we don't it's gonna be awful 'round here. We won't be able to do anythin'. Maybe she ain't 'fraid o' snakes and all, but maybe she ain't as much as she says. Maybe she was just tryin' t'scare us too."

Tiny said, reflectively, "I like her in a sort."

"Oh," Dez said, with an expansive wave, "she's all right. But I ain't scared of her."

"Some story she tole," Tiny said. "A bang-up."

"About Fort Sumter, y'mean?"

"Oh, that was good too. But I mean about Georgia. Gen'r'l Sherman. On'y I thought Miz Griggs says the Yankees won it. Aunt Jessie, she said th' Rebs won it. If th' Rebs—"

"She says the Rebs won the whole war."

"But if'n they won the war—"

Dez shrugged. "I guess she's sorta a Reb herself. I guess that's it. 'Course

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we won the war. Didn't Dad say about how we chased them Rebs right outa Gettsyburg here?"

"I like her," Tiny said again. "When she tells stories like that. She has good stories. Dad never has new ones." There were many editors who would have agreed with him. John Stuart, Sr., had been writing one story beautifully all his life.

"Well," said Dez, "Let's get goin'."

"My turn t'win," Tiny said. "You always win. Gimme a turn.'

"All right."

. . . In the kitchen, Emmaline remarked with sarcasm, "Well, man, yo' asked fo' a tow'rin' pow'rful woman, and man, you got her, and yo' can keep her. Dat Miz Micawber, she sho' kep them hyenas sittin' at the table lak dey was human, and not a sassy word out'n dere mouf."

"Yeah," said Aleck. "She gwine to keep them boys in line all right, but when I asked fo' strength, I didn't ask for no woman what don't know the Civil War is ovuh and what figgers Marse Stuart is runnin' himself here a slave farm. That lady, she's a real Southern lady, she is."

"Yea," Emmaline said darkly, "she got mysterious charms, she do. Folks what come from Wake Hill, dey consert wid evil sperrits."

Aleck looked at her with new interest, the whites of his eyes showing with startling clarity. "That's right. Yo' come from Car'lina yo'self, don' yo', Emmaline."

Emmaline nodded. "But I don' come from no Wake Hill. Backlands, dat is, wheah dey's strange folk. My mammy, she said t'me oncet, 'Datter,' she say, 'if'n yo' meet folks what come from out'n Wake Hill way, evoid 'em like pizen. Dey consert wid Satan and evil sperrits and dey got pow'rful charms. . . . What for she hole dat tooter so reverent."

"Ain't no tooter," Aleck said, with superiority. "That's a bugle, all moldy." He paused. "But now that yo' mention it, she did tell them boys—"

"What she tell 'em?"

"She told 'em that bugle had a secret charm. Everytime they go to ack fresh, she say, 'Behave or I blow the bugle.'" He scratched his head uneasily.

"Gabriel," said Emmaline darkly, "he blow his hawn some day too."

"Lawd," said Aleck, "yo' don't reckon she got old Gabe's horn?"

"Ain't sayin'," replied Emmaline, less darkly and more shaken. The thought hadn't really occurred to her. Then, upstairs, they heard the racket begin and they winced.

"Piller-fight," Aleck said in a low voice. He listened. He could hear her steps mounting the stairs, each step creaking tiredly beneath the weight. "There she go. Quick Emmaline, yo' take a look and see if'n she carry that bugle upstairs."

Emmaline peeked through the kitchen door which she opened a crack. She groaned openly. "Lawd, she doin' it, she takin' dat tootin' instr'ment upstahs wid her. Glo'y, Aleck, now we hears de last trump!"

BUT they did not hear the last trump.

Aunt Jessie, her face grim, walked into the boys' room and being a little too old to duck, caught a wild throw from Tiny across the legs. She staggered. Tiny, horrified at his act, submerged beneath the sheet.

"Now then!" Aunt Jessie bellowed.

Dez, uneasy, attempted arrogance, but his eyes were riveted on the green bugle which she held in her hand.

"I've got a mind to blow this bugle!" Aunt Jessie stormed. "Now you two

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scalawags just get t'sleep in a lickety-splittin' hurry or I'll sound on this horn and show yo' business!"

Dez took a deep breath and remained sitting. "Oh, shucks," he said. "I ain't afraid of that bugle. It's just an ole green bugle fulla mold. Wouldn't hurt a flea, and I bet you can't even blow it anyhow!"

Aunt Jessie did not r e p l y at once. She walked to his bed and stood close to him, so that he had to look up. The psychological effect was enormous. Dez slowly wilted and sank d o w n to his pillow.

"Brat," Aunt Jessie s a i d in a low, rough voice, "I could blow this thing till yo' ears rattled!"

"Gwan and blow it then," Dez said, gulping. "I ain't afraid."

Tiny might h a v e added, "Me neither," but whatever he said was very muffled under the sheet.

Aunt Jessie pulled the sheets off both the boys. "Get up," she said. "Get up and get to th' window."

They rose slowly and slid sidewise to the window, afraid of a slap in the rear while they moved. Outside, there was a moon, and the night was clear. From the window, they could look across the fields.

These same fields which had felt the soak of blood and the weight of dying men, and the strange, horrible vibration of the wounded's screams. Now they were lush green and soft, and only the white marble stones studding them were evidence of the past.

"I'm g o i n'," Aunt Jessie rumbled, "t'tell you one more story t'night."

Tiny and Dez didn't look pleased. It wouldn't be a good story, not w h e n they had caused it instead of asking for it. Dez said, " 'Bout the bugle?" and his throat wasn't clear so that the words jumbled and made him sound frightened. He cleared his throat lustily to repeat the question in firmer, more virile tones.

Aunt Jessie sat on the edge of a bed and let the moldy b u g l e turn in her hands while her eyes regarded it with a respect akin to awe. "From that window," she said, "yo' can a l l b u t see Pickett 'n' Heth charge th' stone wall, can't you?"

"Almost," Tiny said. "Dez and me been all ovuh there."

"This bugle," said Aunt Jessie, "it b'longed to your great grandpa Micawber. He was in th' charge, he was. He was bugler. He blew th' bugle for th' charge, and he himself lived t'tell the tale.

"When Grandpa Joe Micawber come home from th' war, he brought this old bugle with 'im. And the day he passed away, he called me to his'n side and he said, 'Jess,' he said, 'I'm a-givin' this yere bugle t' you. It's a d e a d man's bugle and it's got a powerful charm. If'n ever you get in trouble and you need help, you just blow th' *Charge* on this bugle and they'll come a-runnin'.'

"And I said t' Grandpa, 'Who'll come runnin', sir?" Aunt Jessie stopped and looked out the window, far out into space.

Breathless, Dez whispered, "Who—who'd he say'd come?"

"Pickett's command," s h e said. "Every last and dead ghost of 'em out'n their graves with bayonets fixed for skewerin'. A line of ghosts, they'll come, dead 'n' gone now, but sprung t'life at the toot of a trump that tooted them t'death seventy-six years ago."

THERE was a dead silence. Tiny held his breath and looked wide-eyed. Dez was impressed, so much so that he said, "Don't believe it."

"D'you think I did?" A u n t Jessie

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said sternly. "D'you think I took a sickly dyin' man's word for it? I ain't a fool exactly. Not that much, not by Jeff Davis' chin-whiskers!"

"He didn' have a n y," Dez said loudly.

Aunt Jessie ignored him. "I didn't believe it either. I never would've believed it, about this old horn. If young Jaxie hadn't blowed it."

The boys moved closer. "Who was Jaxie?"

"He was a darkie on the plantation. He was young and he got mighty happy when he got freed, and he heerd the story o' the bugle and laughed. One night, he stole this bugle and he went out'n the country to b l o w on it. He called up them ghosts. Old Man Cathaway, who lived down where J a x i e blew it, he heard the horn and came out prowlin' to see what-for. Lord!"

"W-what?" Tiny said.

"He said he seen Jaxie standin' there, and all them white ghosts all aroun' with torches burnin', and next mornin', we found Jaxie all skewe'd and the bugle lyin' on the ground next t'him."

"Golly," Dez said, grudgingly.

"He called up t h e m ghosts foolin' and they skewe'd him. He weren't in trouble or they'd've helped him. But he didn't believe it so that's what he got. And that's what you two'll get if I ever blow this here horn when you don't do like I say. Hear me?"

"Yes, ma'm," they replied politely.

"Into bed then and not a snicker out'n you till dawn!"

They plunged into bed and pulled the sheets up, and Aunt Jessie watched them for a moment from the door. Then she left, taking the bugle with her. When she had been gone a decent interval of time, Dez stirred and whispered faintly, "Tiny."

"Yeah?"

"It coulda been th' Klu Klux Klan. Miss Griggs says they usta plague the darkies. All in white and with fire."

"D'yuh really think so?"

Dez hesitated a moment. "No," he said finally. He sank back, and soon they had both joined the night.

LATE in the afternoon of July second, Desmond hid the old green bugle. It was an act of self-defense. He had not expected t h e episode of t h e mouse to have turned out so successfully. But when it did, Dez failed to feel the glow of satisfaction he had expected.

For one thing, the b u g l e bothered him, and when he heard Aunt Jessie's squeals of horror, he knew he had to get that bugle out of the way or he and Tiny would be skewered on bayonet points before the night was out. Not that he really believed it, Dez assured himself, but even his Dad had once told him that nothing was impossible.

He hid the horn under his bed behind the white skull of the dead cow he had unearthed up in Willowhaven in the spring.

Then he went back downstairs to get his licking.

It was Tiny's thought, originally. For two weeks, both the boys had breathed the air which angels breathe, awed and puzzled by their Great-aunt Jessie Micawber. They had known few women in their lives; sometimes it was hard for Dez e v e n to remember his mother. Tiny, of course, never e v e n saw her. He c o s t her her l i f e. The women they had known had never bothered them.

Aunt Jessie was not only a surprise to them, she was almost mythical. Dez remembered the bedtime story his Dad had told them one night, a b o u t the Greek named Achilles who was invin-

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cible. Dez had always had a secret ambition after that to be like Achilles, plus an invincible heel.

Well, there was Aunt Jessie for you. Achilles without a bum heel.

"Golly," Dez murmured one night when he and Tiny discussed the past day in guarded whispers, "ain't she afraid o' *nothin'?*"

"Nothin'," Tiny replied. "'Ceptin' maybe a mouse. We never tried a mouse. I figgered a mouse'd scare any lady ina worl'. Elephants too."

"A mouse!" Dez exclaimed. "A nice big fieldmouse! We'll catch one in th' catch-'em-alive trap tomorrer and try it out. Hot ziggity, Tiny, I think you really got somethin' that time! A mouse!"

The experiment was a successful failure. Tiny's idea had been very good indeed. Aunt Jessie didn't like mice. She'd squealed and jumped on a chair (at her age too!) and now that it was over, the two of them lay quietly in bed, not saying a word for fear Aunt Jessie would hear them and return. Yes, a successful failure, for it was the first time Aunt Jessie had resorted to corporal punishment and forgotten the bugle.

"Hurt much?" Dez whispered presently.

"Not so bad," Tiny said. "But dog-gone, she's better'n Dad even. Dad never licked us with no bedroom slippers. It stung."

Dez nodded. It was dark in the room and Tiny couldn't see him. "She ain't dumb. Dad hurts his hand more'n us. Not Aunt Jessie. Golly, you sure yelled. You had me fooled."

Tiny replied with pride, "I was pretty good, wasn't I, Dez?"

"Yeah," Dez said. "She cut you short. Bet she thinks she half murdered you."

"Why'n't you yell, Dez?"

"Oh, shucks," Dez said, "I'm older'n you. I got t'show I can take it. Did sting though. 'Nite."

They slept.

Dez heard the car come in off the road and stop below them. But he was not awake, and he had the distinct impression that it had gone by on the highway toward Carlisle. He only remembered it later.

TINY'S first scream of terror brought Dez to life. He opened his eyes, thinking he had dreamed it; the man's deep voice, the scuffling on the floor. But it was real, for Tiny screamed again, shrill and high, and Dez was quickly out of bed, shivering, feeling the hair on the back of his neck standing up, his heart beating wildly.

There was a struggle at Tiny's bed, and Dez saw the man move to the window, carrying Tiny awkwardly, Tiny crying frantically all the time. At the window, Dez saw the man's face—Herman Mantz, the fellow who had worked as a chore boy for Mr. Jonathan over at Twin Acres.

Dez ran to the window as Mantz threw one leg over the sill and the boy buried his teeth in the leg which still stayed in the room. Mantz roared dully and buffeted Dez about the head, finally giving him a blow which sent the boy skidding lengthwise beneath his own bed.

When Dez could raise his head again, his ears stinging from the cuffs, Mantz was gone, carrying Tiny down the ladder outside the window. Dez, panting, yelled, "Aunt Jessie! Aunt Jessie!"

But she was already there, and she took in the situation in a quick horrified glance and scampered to the window to look down, half-sobbing.

"Too late," she groaned. And then

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she ran from the room; she rushed down the stairs and out the front door.

Under the bed, Dez's hand closed around the bugle. The moldy green bugle which he had hidden there before the mouse episode in order to prevent reprisals. That darkie Jaxie had blown it once and died, because he hadn't been in trouble. But, Dez thought, we're in trouble. Golly we're in trouble!

He sprang to the window, carrying the bugle. He could see the car already under way, its wheels spinning in the gravel and then kicking up dust as it went down the lane toward the highway along the front of the Stuart property. There wasn't any other way, Dez thought frantically. Aunt Jessie couldn't stop that car, not by running after it a few steps as he saw her do; the police wouldn't do any good, they'd have to find the car first, after coming all the way from town.

Dez raised the bugle. The mouthpiece trembled against his lips. He could blow two calls, *Mess* and *Charge*. And these he was sketchy on. He took a deep breath, compressed his lips and blew the *Charge*.

The first time the bugle made a strange gulping sound. The second time he hit it, and as the fleeing car reached the highway and turned west, its headlights bringing the road to life out of the dark, the notes went out across the moonlit meadows, full and mellow and clear.

He did it once more to be certain. This time, there was artistry in the call. Down by the turnpike, old Mrs. Swasker heard it from her dark bedroom and was to tell, later, how she thought it was the dead, rising from the graves to fight again. Strange and wonderful, those plaintive notes; carrying across the rich and starlit tapestry of the night, they called to a ghost and his command.

Dez let the bugle swing down to his side while he stood in the window, shivering, his face wet with sweat, his hands cold. He could not take his eyes off the fleeing car, now going west on the highway, its black bulk still visible from the reflection of its own headlights.

And then, faintly, he heard a sound. It grew. It came from the west, further west than the car. The car rushed to meet it. Suddenly that ominous rumble, like very distant thunder, became stronger and more clearly defined; it became the dull, pounding beat of swiftly maching men.

THEY came over the hill by Fitch's Mill, and Dez saw them in all their weird splendor. Soldiers on the run, soldiers in khaki, charging down the highway, down Pope's Slope directly in the path of the fleeing automobile. Dez rushed to his drawer and pulled out the telescope a birthday had won him. Back at the window, he focused it on the scene.

"Glory in a hencoop!" he breathed, awed to reverence. "Ain't that somethin'!"

Soldiers, charging soldiers in khaki, not Confederate gray, their rifles burning silver in the moonlight, the cadence of their running feet filling the night.

"Skewer! Skewer!" Dez cried. "They'll skewer 'im proper!"

Swiftly they passed out of sight; they were hidden by a small hill called the Knob, and so was the fleeing automobile.

There was another car going west on the highway now. Aunt Jessie was in that one, with Aleck driving. Dez remembered them going, vaguely while he watched those spectral soldiers. There was a horse-pistol clenched in Aunt Jessie's hand as she urged the

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ashen Aleck forward with all speed. But Dez didn't know about that.

He hung the bugle back in Aunt Jessie's room, on the same hook from which he had purloined it earlier in the day. For a moment he stared at it in silence, paying it quiet homage. He had rubbed Aladdin's lamp and the genie had answered his plea. Who else, in all the earth, could boast the same?

Then he went downstairs to wait, nervous and still afraid, on the porch where Emmaline wrung her hands and rolled her eyes and paced the floorboards until they groaned.

THEY didn't bring Tiny back for a long time, but when they did, he was all right. He wasn't even frightened and crying anymore; instead his eyes were full of the wonders he had seen. He came in the police car with Constable Daly, from Gettysburg, and Aunt Jessie. Aleck drove in alone, in the Stuart car. And after awhile, Mr. Jonathan arrived in his car.

Both the boys were shooed inside, but Dez hovered by the open window and listened attentively, not to Tiny who was pouring out the more sanguine details of the episode, but to Constable Daly outside.

"Well, it was Mr. Stuart's own fault, ma'm," the constable told Aunt Jessie. "He shoulda pressed larceny charges against this Mantz in the first place. Kinda sad in a way, a man with the mind of a child. I don't reckon he woulda really hurt Tiny.

"He says he was stealin' money all the time to go to California. He says he was just mad at Mr. Stuart for catchin' him and he figured he'd steal Tiny and then ask for a hundred dollars to give Tiny back. And then he was going to California. See how it is?

"And him not even realizing that Mr. Stuart was away in Hollywood. Very sad, ma'm, belongs in an institution, and I reckon we'll put him there now 'cause we don't need no signed complaint for this one."

"Yes," said Jonathan. "And on top of everything else, I had to be down in Gettysburg, Miss Micawber, on the one night you used the bugle. Why, if I hadn't arranged with my boy, Danny, you might not have caught up with Mantz and Tony for a long time. Golly, it makes my blood run cold."

"I didn't blow the bugle," Aunt Jessie whispered hoarsely. "But I heard it too. I reckon Dez—"

"Well, some one blew it," said Jonathan. "I heard it myself, from way down the road. I was coming home. And you would never have raised them soldiers without it."

"They took the breath from me," Aunt Jessie exclaimed. "Where in tarnation did them soldiers ever come from?"

"I was telling you," said Jonathan. "You see, there's a three-day holiday around these parts to celebrate the Battle of Gettysburg. Once a year, at this time, we always give a guard of honor to the cemeteries, and the town boys of the National Guard come down here in the fields with their companies, and they pitch a camp at night, and by day they act as sentries for the soldier dead."

"But I don't figger—"

"Well, you see, Danny Jonathan is my boy, my oldest boy, and he's a sergeant in the National Guard, and he got stationed right down by Fitch's Mill, so's he could come over to his own home fairly easy when he had furlough. And when I had to go into town tonight, I didn't want to leave you all without no protection, so I drove over by the encampment behind Fitch's Mill and saw Danny.

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"I told Danny the situation and I said that if he or his men heard a bugle call from the Stuart house, it meant bad trouble and no fooling, and would he and his men come a-running to help you out. I never dreamed there'd be trouble like this.

"Well, when that bugle blew, Danny got his men together, and they came over the hill. I saw 'em from way back on the town road, and it was kind of a stirring sight."

"God bless the Yanks," said Aunt Jessie in a whisper. "And God bless you too, Mr. Jonathan. For Yankees, you folks is right decent, and when I go back to Wake Hill, I'll tell my folks aroun' that Yanks ain't as bad as we figgered. Good night all."

Dez had heard an earful. He had already sent Tiny on upstairs. Now he soundlessly crept up to the bedroom, and there Tiny instantly began to spout a tale of high adventure, with lurid trimmings of his own invention, such molten swords and fiery faces.

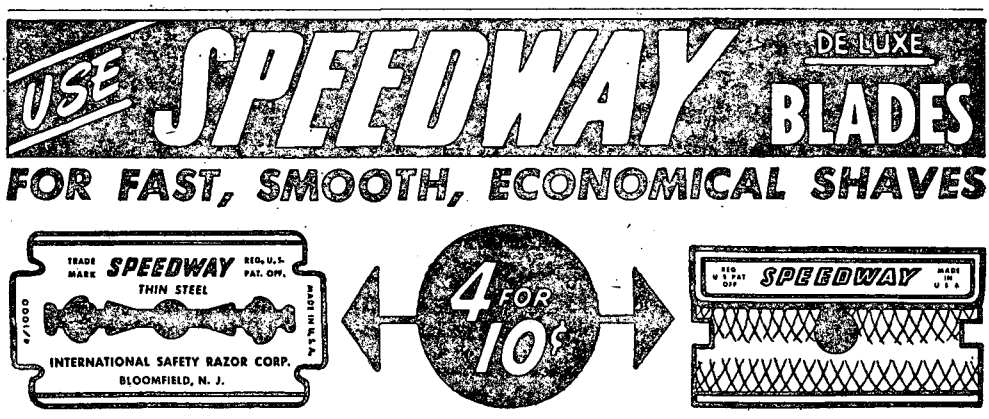
Aunt Jessie came up in a few moments to tuck them in. She bluntly hushed Tiny's graphic description of things he had not seen. "Now then," she said heavily, "into bed with both o' you, and sleep like decent souls with no more talkin' this bad night! Tiny, you save it fo' mornin'. If'n you boys ain't t'sleep in a minute flat" — her sharp eyes singled out Dez's thin, freckled face—"why, I'll blow that ole bugle again!"

Tiny collapsed limply upon his pillow in an awed and respectful silence. Dez hesitated. For a moment he wanted to say, "There weren't no National Guard in Pickett's charge. Miss Griggs tole us 'bout it and there wasn't no National Guard." But the moment passed, and he climbed obediently into bed. . .

Two days later when they dropped the white wood-spider down Emmaline's neck and sent her scurrying from the kitchen in hysterics, the boys—in their getaway — made no attempt to corner the bugle.

Tiny, concerned with the urgency of retreat, never even thought of it. Dez, thinking of it, dismissed its power of reprisal with a faint grunt as he ran for the safety of the hayloft.

And Aunt Jessie, having noted that the bugle had not been snatched from the wall after the mayhem, was astute enough not to speak of blowing it that same night when she fed the boys the sole of her slipper. Indeed, she never even mentioned the bugle again; she went so far as to remove it from the hook in her room, and she buried it deep in a carpet-bag where it would not have to prove itself again, ever.



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MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
Mike Fink,
"TERROR OF THE RIVER."
King of Keelboatmen
MIKE WAS BORN IN PITTSBURGH IN 1770. AT 13 HE TOOK HIS FIRST SCALP; AT 15, BECAUSE OF HIS DEADLY AIM, HE WAS EXCLUDED FROM RIFLE-SHOOTING CONTESTS; AT 18 HE LICKED THE BULLY OF THE RIVER, NO HOLDS BARRED, FOR HIS PLACE ON A MISSISSIPPI KEELBOAT.
AT LOUISVILLE, ON A BET, MIKE SHOT OFF AN INDIAN'S SCALPLOCK. THE BRAVE AND HIS BAND FOLLOWED 1,000 MILES AND ATTACKED MIKE'S BOAT. MIKE KILLED THE REDSKIN IN A HAND-TO-HAND FIGHT, AND IN ADMIRATION FOR HIS TENACITY -- INSISTED HE BE GIVEN A DECENT BURIAL.
FOR YEARS THE BRAWNY HERCULES WAS BOSS OF THE RIVER. HE KILLED A BEAR WITH HIS BARE HANDS; RID THE OHIO OF ITS WORST SCOURGE WHEN HE WIPED OUT THE PIRATE LAIR AT NOTORIOUS CAVE-IN-ROCK.
IN ATTEMPTING TO SHOOT A GLASS OF WHISKEY OFF ONE CARPENTER'S HEAD, MIKE KILLED THE MAN. WHILE HE EXPLAINED TO CARPENTER'S BEST FRIEND, THE LATTER DREW A PISTOL, FIRED, AND THE CAREER OF THE GREAT KEELBOATMAN WAS OVER.
SO MANY LEGENDS HAVE GROWN UP AROUND THE REAL MIKE FINK THAT HE HAS TAKEN HIS PLACE BESIDE THE LOGGERS, PAUL BUNYAN AND THE NEGROES JOHN HENRY IN AMERICAN FOLKLORE!

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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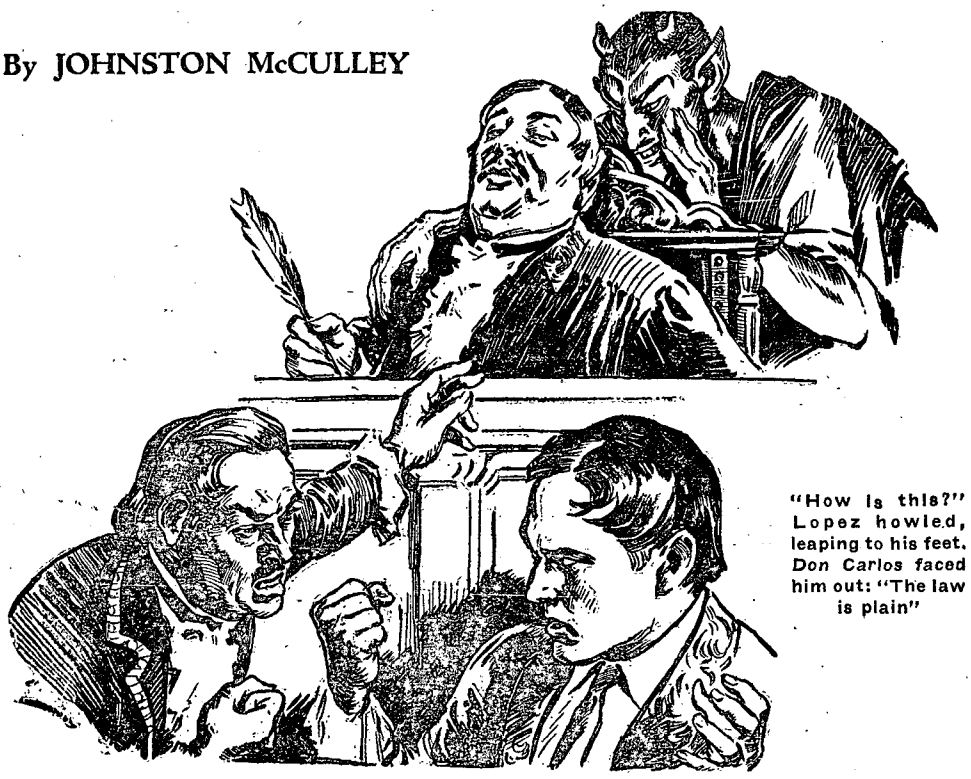
By JOHNSTON McCULLEY



"How is this?" Lopez howled, leaping to his feet. *Don Carlos faced him out: "The law is plain"*

The Devil's Doubloons

Take from here this racing story of how honor and valor come to judgment in the most romantic days of Alta California

DON CARLOS DE LA MENDOZA, last of a noble Spanish family, prepares to take his own life in Monterey, in Alta California. Educated to be an advocate, he has been unsuccessful first at home, then in Mexico, and now in this new country. His money is gone.

As he is about to shoot himself, Don Carlos hears a knock on the door. A peon stands there, bearing a casket; he vanishes into the night without waiting for money. With the casket Don Carlos finds a note: "Use what you find in this little casket as your capital. . . . Hold half the profit for me. . . . Follow the suggestions that may come to you."

The note is signed: EL DIABLO.

Opening the casket, Don Carlos finds five gold doubloons, which seem for a moment to have about them the odor of brimstone. . . .

BUT there is another surprise; another knock on the door. A young woman, fashionably dressed and apparently very beautiful (though completely masked) asks Mendoza to escort her to the *cantina* of PEDRO PULIDO, where she sings and dances to earn gold for her invalid father. She says she is called CARMENCITA, and comes—like Don Carlos—of an ancient and distinguished family.

They go to the *cantina* together. On Carmencita's suggestion Don Carlos hazards one of El Diablo's gold pieces at a game of chance—and is rewarded by huge gains before she urges him to stop. She then takes him to meet Pedro Pulido, proprietor of the *cantina,* who urges Don Carlos to set himself up as an advocate in Monterey.

As Mendoza is seated in the *cantina,* after Carmencita has sung and danced, he is approached by JUANITA, one of the *cantina* girls, who tries vainly to poison his mind against Carmencita.

This story started in the Argosy for March 16

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CAPITÁN ZUBIATE, *commandante* of the Monterey *presidio* and spy for His Excellency the Governor, comes to Mendoza's table and speaks slurringly of the masked *señorita*. They quarrel bitterly, and the *capitán* departs hurling vicious threats at the young advocate.

THEN Carmencita starts toward his table, and on the way is insulted by MARCOS LOPEZ, the trader, who has lost heavily to Mendoza at the gaming tables. As Lopez is about to tear off Carmencita's mask, Don Carlos intervenes, and is forced to fight a number of Lopez' hirelings. Fighting by his side is young DON JOSE SENTOUS, who often casts longing eyes at Carmencita.

After the fight Don Carlos discovers that a knife thrust of the treacherous Lopez has been turned aside from his body by one of El Diablo's doubloons. He takes his gold and starts home, escorted by two of Pulido's servants. On the way they are attached, the servants disarmed; Don Carlos trips and sprawls.

"You escaped us at the *cantina*," one of his assailants shouts, "but we have you now!" . . .

CHAPTER VI

ADVICE FROM EL DIABLO

THE fact that Don Carlos was serious-minded and of a studious nature had not prevented him from learning how to handle a blade to advantage.

His ancestors had wielded weapons through the ages, and it was said of each male Mendoza that he was born with a sword in one hand and a poniard in the other, and with an inborn knowledge of how to use them.

Don Carlos had a natural aptitude in swordsmanship which had been supplemented by the teachings of a master of fence. With a drawn blade in his hand, a new light came into his eyes, an effervescence surged through his body, and he became a different man.

As his assailants rushed upon him now in the semi-darkness, Don Carlos lurched to one side and managed to regain his footing. He snapped his blade out of its scabbard.

With his back to the adobe wall, he half crouched, trying to see, careful not to make an attack upon either of the two peons who had been escorting him, and whose escort had been little better than naught.

He was able to see that one of the peons had been rendered senseless, and that the other was on his hands and knees and trying to crawl away, shaking his head as if partially dazed. One of the men who had rushed out of the night was watching the crawling peon. There were four others, and Don Carlos found these four arrayed against him.

Faint streaks of light as the rays of the moon glinted from metal warned him of knives. No doubt these rogues had bludgeons, too, Don Carlos reasoned.

This attack might mean only an attempt at robbery, but it could mean also that somebody wanted him removed. If he could compel his foes to keep their distance, he might have a chance to escape this trap unscathed.

As they whirled and charged toward him, Don Carlos shifted his position swiftly and ran the nearest rogue through the body. The man moaned and dropped, and Don Carlos quickly shifted his position again and got a second man through his shoulder, making him retreat.

Something whizzed past Don Carlos' head and thudded against the adobe wall behind him, and he realized that a bludgeon or heavy stone had missed narrowly. He darted aside as a second missile came.

"Come and taste steel, curs!" he cried.

THE rogue who had been watching the peon turned and came rushing back to the aid of his two unwounded

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companions. The peon immediately sprang to his feet and charged off into the night, howling for help. So this, thought Don Carlos, was not one of the mutes.

Don Carlos saw his foes start to charge at him through the darkness. His blade darted out, and another man fell, but Don Carlos felt the point of a knife slit his left sleeve, and a streak of fire seemed to run along his arm.

There were still two standing against him. Something came out of the darkness and delivered him a smashing blow on his left shoulder, spinning him half way around. He realized that a stone had been hurled at him.

But it had been a merciful stone, for as its impact threw him off balance a knife flashed past where he had been a moment before, and clattered against the wall.

"At me, scum! Let us have an end of it!" Don Carlos cried.

He turned and charged straight at the pair remaining unhurt. They separated. He rushed between them, and one threw out a leg and tripped him, bringing him crashing to earth. With wild howls, they hurled themselves at him.

But Don Carlos was not there to supply an object for their rage. He rolled aside and sprang to his feet nimbly, swept up his blade from the ground, and went at them again. Once more the blade found a target, and a man groaned and fell.

The last of his assailants howled in fear, and turned and fled into the darkness.

Don Carlos reeled back against the wall, a feeling of faintness coming upon him. He braced himself against the masonry to keep his feet. He saw torches appear suddenly a short distance away, and realized men were hurrying toward him, led by the peon who had gone for help.

Pulling himself together, Don Carlos groped along the wall until he located his bag of gold. He was gripping this in his left hand and his blade in his right when the peon hurried up with others behind him.

"Are you injured, Don Carlos?" the man cried. "Did the rogues do you harm?"

"I have a slight scratch, I believe," Don Carlos replied, "and a bad bruise on the shoulder."

"They were on us before we could make a move, Don Carlos," the peon said. "They rushed at us from the dark. Señor Pulido will deal harshly with us for allowing this to happen to you."

"Tell Señor Pulido that I request he does not punish you at all," Don Carlos told the man. "It has been a rare adventure which served to break the monotony."

THE flaring torches revealed the scene clearly now, the dead and wounded ruffians, and the other peon, who had been smashed on the head but now was regaining consciousness.

Through the group, Capitán Zubiate thrust his way in a commanding manner.

"What is all this disturbance in a public place?" the *capitán* demanded. "Who has been howling for help? Who is responsible for all this blood and death?"

"I assure you that I did not call for help, *capitán,* not having need of any," Don Carlos told him. "I was set upon by some misguided ruffians and merely defended myself, that is all."

"A pretty scene! Who aided you in disposing of these rogues?"

"Aided me, *señor?* I needed no aid. There were but five of them."

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"You appear to be amply able to take care of yourself, Don Carlos—against such fellows as these."

"Or against their betters," Don Carlos assured him, promptly. "Taking care of himself seems to be a necessary part of a man's ability in a place where the soldiery cannot command the situation and assure a citizen of protection."

"This makes two brawls you have been in this evening," Zubiate observed.

"Things run in threes, it is said," Don Carlos reminded him. "Beware the third brawl, *capitán.*"

"Have you been injured badly? Are you able to continue to your lodging?"

Don Carlos' fit of weakness had passed. He straightened, returned his blade to its scabbard, and bowed to Zubiate.

"I can continue with the men who started with me from the *cantina, capitán,*" he replied. "'Tis but a step more. Do not concern yourself about me. I have no wish to discommode the soldiery."

"Some of these rogues are not dead. Do you wished to make complaint against them?"

"I cannot be bothered with that, and I wash my hands of the affair, *Señor el Capitán.* Do as you please with them. They are but hired assassins and thieves. 'Tis the master with whom you should deal."

"Name him!"

"Ah, no, *señor.* I have no absolute proof, and I committ no slander. But, as the rogues dashed upon me out of the darkness, one gave a cry. 'You escaped us at the *cantina,* but we have you now,' he said.

You were at the *cantina, capitán,* and know whose friends attacked me there. It is a matter for the soldiery. I am done with the affair."

Don Carlos bowed again, and turned to walk away, starting out slowly, with the two peons from the *cantina* at his heels, one still staggering because of the beating he had received.

AS THEY neared the *posada,* the uninjured peon ran on ahead with the news of what had occurred, and the landlord himself was waiting when Don Carlos arrived. He had warm water, medicines and clothes ready.

Don Carlos' jacket was removed to expose a shirt sleeve drenched with blood and slit for a distance of about eighteen inches.

The cut was long but not deep, being only a scratch in some places. The landlord bathed and bandaged the arm. Don Carlos had a bruised and swollen shoulder, where he had been struck, and the landlord dressed that also.

Don Carlos thanked him and went alone through the patio and to his room, carrying his precious bag of gold.

Fresh tapers had been put into the candelabra by some servant during his absence, and one was burning. Don Carlos tossed his bag of gold upon the table, and lit the other tapers from the first. Light sprang up and chased shadows from the corners of the room.

He closed the door and put the bar in place across it. Returning to the table, he emptied all his pockets of gold coins and heaped them beside the bag. He supposed he had lost some during his fight in the narrow street.

Sitting on the stool, he reached for the decanter to pour himself a goblet of wine. His eyes widened suddenly. Before him on the end of the table was an epistle which had not been there when he had left the room to escort Carmencita to the *cantina.*

Don Carlos picked it up, broke the seal quickly and spread out the sheet

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of paper. Again he saw the fine penmanship done with red fluid. He read swiftly:

> ***Don Carlos—By this time, you know the power of the doubloons. As their power increases, and also your own because of them, exhibit those qualities of nobility for which members of your family have been noted in the past. Aid the oppressed, help the weak, right wrongs, and always be stern in dealing out justice.***
>
> ***El Diablo***

Don Carlos mused:

"'Tis not like the Evil One to order me to help the weak and aid the oppressed, and above all to be stern in dealing out justice. If Satan has turned saint, 'twill be a better world. But he may be playing some deep, dark game which will work toward the destruction of men, including myself."

He folded the letter and opened the drawer of the table to put it with the first he had received. He caught sight of the loaded pistol, and shuddered. It was difficult for him to believe that such a short time ago he had been at the point of self-destruction.

Working slowly because his arm was sore from the cut he had received and stiff on account of the bandages which bound it, Don Carlos got off his boots and outer clothing and wrapped himself in a thick, warm robe.

It was a proper time to retire, but he did not feel like sleep. His brain was busy with plans and schemes.

He knew of a good house he could buy at a bargain, its owner having moved to Santa Barbara. He knew where he could acquire suitable furnishings immediately. It would not take him long to establish himself in a home where he could live as a Mendoza should, and entertain persons of blood and importance. With cash in hand, he could command speed.

But he desired to establish himself professionally also, and with as little delay as possible. To appear as an advocate and win a cause was necessary if he was to attract attention to himself. He would have to find a litigant with a cause important enough to create talk.

As he paced around the room thinking, somebody knocked on the door. Don Carlos called a demand to know who knocked.

"It is I, my son," a soft voice answered.

Don Carlos sprang to the door, knowing that voice well.

"Fray Luis!"

CHAPTER VII

REMEMBER THE ENEMY

THERE was not a man in Alta California he wanted to see more at that moment. He hastily unbarred and opened the door, and bowed as the aged *fray* entered. He closed the door again and turned eagerly to offer a stool and pour a goblet of wine.

Fray Luis was old, withered, emaciated; but his eyes still glowed with zeal. He had labored in Alta California for years, at different stations along El Camino Real. Several missions and many chapels had known him. The natives reverenced him, and he had made many converts.

"I was at a hut nearby, granting absolution to a dying native," Fray Luis said, "and decided to stop at the *posada* for a moment. The landlord told me of your plight. Have you need of my services, my son?"

"Not for my wound, Fray Luis. It is little more than a scratch, and the landlord dressed it well. But there are other matters."

Don Carlos sat down close to the old

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fray and talked swiftly and in low tones. He confessed how he had planned for self-destruction, hanging his head in shame as he spoke of it, then gave a recital of the events of the night. He omitted nothing.

"Let me see the letter and the casket, my son," Fray Luis said.

The *fray* read the letter and inspected the casket well, and perused the second letter also.

"My son, Satan often has tempted men with gold, and also with sparkling wine and beautiful women, and with many other things which seem attractive at times. Temptation in all its forms is a part of Satan's scheme of things."

"What shall I do, Fray Luis?"

"Use your brains, my son. I see in this affair only the attempt of some kind soul to help you without approaching you openly and offering the charity which you would not accept."

"Who could have known of my extremity? I have tried to hide it well."

"That is a question I cannot answer, my son, but somebody knew of it undoubtedly."

"But the huge winnings which came to me as the result of the *señorita's* suggestion?" Don Carlos asked.

"A streak of luck—and coincidence."

"The doubloon that saved my life—"

"Your life was spared, my son, but undoubtedly by some Power greater than a doubloon."

"The hot coin, and the odor of brimstone—"

"Your benefactor is a joker also. He knows a little of chemistry. The shredded silk upon which the coins rested perhaps had been treated with a chemical which became active when the box was opened and its contents exposed to the air."

"What shall I do, *fray?*"

"DO AS the first letter directed, and see what follows," Fray Luis advised. "Put aside half this gold for the unknown benefactor who sent you the doubloons. Use the other half to establish yourself. What could be more sensible than that? And of all you gain hereafter, put aside half until it is demanded of you."

"Will you take charge for me of the half to be held?" Don Carlos asked.

"Gladly, my son. Divide the gold now, and I'll carry the half away with me. Nobody will suspect a ragged old *fray* of carrying a fortune in gold. Nor would even a rogue dare rob me, lest he bring a curse upon himself."

"A happy thought comes to me, Fray Luis. After I have established myself, I shall have sufficient gold remaining to live properly for a time without income. As an act of gratitude, I should like to espouse the good cause of some man who is not able to retain an advocate."

"I have just the cause for you." Fray Luis said. "You can serve justice and make a name for yourself at the same time. Defend the cause of Don Antonio de la Prado."

"Explain, *fray.*"

"Don Antonio is a worthy old grandee, and these last few years he has been ill in body and mind, so that advantage has been taken of him. He had a fine *rancho* back in the hills, and it was developing into an affair of large profits. He also has a *casa* out by the bay—"

"I know the place," Don Carlos interrupted. "I have heard something of the case, but have forgotten."

"Marcos Lopez claimed the *rancho* because of a debt. He got the bill of debt from the estate of a proper man who loaned money to Don Antonio in the name of friendship. Lopez holds

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the property now, but no doubt could be ousted by a clever advocate. There are certain unjust forces in this land—"

"I understand, *fray*. Marcos Lopez has power with those of influence."

"Don Antonio was too ill to make a proper fight," Fray Luis continued. "Friends came to his aid and offered the amount, but Marcos Lopez demanded the *rancho*. The fellow presumes to gentility, and would be master of a great estate."

"If Don Antonio will permit me, I will look into the matter for him."

"I will see him on the morrow, my son, and instruct him to let you handle the affair. Marcos Lopez—and I do not hesitate to say it—is a swindler and a thief. There is neither honesty nor kindness in him. He is a despoiler of native girls, and has for friends those who attack the weak and defenseless. He is strong in his hates and unscrupulous in his methods, and has men of the same ilk allied with him."

"So I understand," Don Carlos said.

"If you attack him, be assured he will resort to every means to defeat you. Guard yourself well, day and night. Assume that you can expect from him no courtesy or fair dealing. He is a consummate rogue."

"I understand, *fray*."

Fray Luis finished his goblet of wine, and they divided the gold carefully. With half of it in a bag of sheepskin which happened to be in the room, the old *fray* tucked it beneath his tattered robe and hobbled to the door.

"Buy your house and furnish it, my son," he said. "Establish yourself solidly. By the time you have done that, I shall have prepared Don Antonio for a conference with you. I know him and his daughter well."

"He has a daughter?" Don Carlos asked.

"A jewel of a daughter! She is sweet, demure, modest, gentle, kind and courageous as well as beautiful. Her careful attention to her sick father is charming. What a wife she will make for the right man!"

Don Carlos' eyes twinkled. "Are you perhaps commencing a career as a match-maker, *fray?*" he asked.

"I could do worse in your case, Don Carlos. A man of your position should have a wife. Do you want your line to end with yourself? Do you want the Mendozas to die out utterly? May I live to christen your first-born, and may it be a son!"

BECAUSE he had learned of Don Carlos' huge winnings at the *cantina*, and feared an attack and robbery in his house, the landlord of the *posada* stationed two armed servants outside Don Carlos' door for the night.

There was only one window in the room, which opened upon the patio, and it was protected by a network of metal bars. No intruder could enter.

Don Carlos slept undisturbed except by his dreams. He arose from his couch soon after dawn, bathed his scratched arm in cool water, dressed carefully and opened the door. The two guards grinned and saluted when they saw him, and Don Carlos tossed each a coin, which broadened their grins.

A mist rolled in from the sea but lifted early, and the day was fair. Don Carlos breakfasted and went forth on his business, first putting all his gold in the leather bag and sealing it, and leaving it in the care of the landlord, who had a strongbox of metal.

Before the sun was directly overhead, Don Carlos had purchased his house. Under a peon overseer, natives were put to work cleaning it. Don Carlos shopped for furnishings, not stop-

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ping even for the siesta hour, and much of what he bought was delivered before nightfall.

On the second day, he continued his buying, and had his furniture arranged. He engaged a staff of trained servants, and also hired a certain Bernardo to be his personal bodyservant.

This Bernardo was a huge man with great strength, whose courage had been tried in native uprisings. He considered it a rare honor to be attached to a Mendoza, and Don Carlos knew he would be loyal.

On the third day, Don Carlos moved to his house from the *posada,* and put his new servants through their paces. An experienced majordomo he had found soon had things running smoothly. The kitchen bins had been stored, and the wine cellar.

Lastly, Don Carlos went to the horse market and bought a carriage pair, a good saddle horse for himself, and a mule for Bernado to use. He acquired a carriage also.

That evening, he sat on the balcony of his house and sipped wine as the darkness came. Bernado placed candelabra on the table beside him and offered him a dish of fruit, and Don Carlos sighed and relaxed. It was good to have a home of his own again.

THERE Fray Luis found him. The old *fray* beamed when Don Carlos arose to greet him; took a goblet of wine, and insisted upon being shown over the house.

" 'Tis a splendid establishment, Don Carlos," Fray Luis said. "And 'tis the talk of the town that you have decided to make Monterey your home and Alta California your arena for action. Now, you must establish yourself professionally."

"I am eager for that."

"In the morning, then, we go to see Don Antonio de la Prado. I have arranged it with him. Shall I be the first to ride with you in your fine carriage, as I am the first to call upon you in your new home?"

"I know of no man I'd rather have be the first," Don Carlos said.

"My son, I want a cautious word with you. I know your ancestry. I, too, came from Old Spain, and know the customs there. But things are somewhat different in this new land. A man is what he makes himself. It is proper that he state his birth and breeding and name his ancestors. But men here are prone to ask what a person has done —himself."

"I understand, *fray.*"

"Understand this also, my son. Calm dignity is to be approved in any man, also a sureness of his position. But arrogant pride does not sit well on the stomachs of men in Alta California. Let a man show himself worthy, and his neighbors will take pride in him."

"Are you rebuking me, *fray?*"

"As gently as possible, my son," Fray Luis replied, smiling.

"Regarding this affair of Don Antonio, I have been giving it some thought," Don Carlos said, like a man eager to change the subject. "If the situation as I see it bears up under my questioning of him, we will be victorious."

"I am glad of that, Don Carlos."

"Customs may be slightly different here in Alta California, as you have so deftly pointed out to me, but there is no change in the King's law. Not even His Excellency the Viceroy dare change that, and certainly not His Excellency the Governor of Alta California. Least of all this fellow now *magistrado* in Monterey."

"You speak of Juan Cazzara?"

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"I believe he is so named."

Fray Luis chuckled. "He is *magistrado* because he once did the Governor a service. I understand. And he feels his position, my son. He even has himself called 'Don.' If you want to see puffed-up false dignity, look upon Juan Cazzara.

"But you have him on one point, Don Carlos. He is perpetually afraid of making an error and revealing his ignorance."

"All the more suited for my purpose," Don Carlos said.

"Have you given any thought to the enemy?" Fray Luis asked. "Do not forget my warnings about Marcos Lopez."

"I'll not forget, *fray.*"

"I'll leave you now, my son."

"May I not send you home in my carriage?"

"Let us save the carriage until the morning. After a life of abject poverty, I cannot endure too much elegance in a short space of time."

CHAPTER VIII

BOW, SEÑOR MAGISTRATE!

UNDER the bright sun of the morning, they drove through the streets and out along the shore of the sparkling bay, looking at the ships riding at anchor there. One was to leave that evening at high tide to voyage around Baja California and to the Mexican coast.

Don Antonio de la Prado's estate had been magnificent for the place and times, but it was in a state of bad repair now. A man could see that poverty had touched it these last years.

They rode up the winding driveway, with Bernardo driving the team, under arches of trees blazing with bloom; and so came to the huge, sprawling house, very little of which was in actual use now.

An elderly servant admitted them, bowing humbly, and escorted them to the big main room where Don Antonio de la Prado awaited them—a thin, emaciated, sick old man propped up in a huge chair with cushions around him and a shawl around his shoulders.

Introductions were spoken, and the elderly servant brought out the inevitable wine, the basket of fruit. Don Carlos questioned slowly, patiently, getting the wheat of fact from the chaff of rambling talk.

Then he asked for certain documents.

"My daughter—" old Don Antonio said, motioning to the servant.

The latter disappeared, but soon was back, and stepped aside to let a girl enter with an elderly *dueña* behind her. In all this house, Don Carlos thought, she was the only thing which represented youth. All else was decay.

He sprang to his feet and bowed from the waist as she approached, and held his head so while Don Antonio spoke:

"Don Carlos de la Mendoza, I present to you my daughter and only child, Inez de la Prado."

Don Carlos looked up, and straight into her eyes. She smiled slightly, and color flooded her face as she gave him greeting. She was tall, lithe, with charming features. She was all Fray Luis has said of her.

"She cares for my papers," Don Antonio said. "Tell her what you wish, Don Carlos."

Don Carlos told her, and she hurried away with her watchful *dueña* at her side. They were back quickly and Señorita Inez offered the papers, which Don Carlos accepted with a bow.

She sat at the end of the table while

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he perused the documents, returning the majority but retaining several which he needed to present his case. She was watching him intently, and the old *dueña* was watching them both, as if the *señorita* had been a helpless chicken and this Don Carlos a hawk.

But they had a moment alone for conversation as Fray Luis engaged the close attention of Don Antonio—perhaps purposely; and the *dueña* relaxed vigilance an instant, since this conversation appeared to be solely about business affairs.

"*Señorita,* I do not like to cause false hopes, but I feel reasonably sure that I can be successful in this enterprise," Don Carlos said. "A wrong has been done by a clever rogue, and if it is in my power the wrong will be righted."

"I thank you, *señor.*"

The voice was faint, but there was richness and quality in it. Don Carlos glanced at her swiftly.

"You appear somewhat familiar to me, *señor,*" she said, the color flooding her face again. "Can it be possible that we have met before?"

"I never saw your charming face before this morning, *señorita,*" he replied, looking straight at her. "If we ever met before, I would be the first to remember it . . . unless you wished our meeting forgotten."

"Thank you, *señor.*"

SHE took her leave then. Don Carlos and Fray Luis took leave also, and drove back to Monterey in the carriage.

Bernardo let the horses have an easy pace because the day was so fine, because his master and the *fray* evidently wished to talk, and perhaps also because Bernardo liked this business of driving a fine team to a fine carriage and wanted to make the journey last.

The *fray* left the carriage to go about his duties. Don Carlos drove on to his house, and told Bernardo he would not require the carriage again until late in the afternoon. He went to a small room he had furnished to be his place of study, perused the documents he had brought with him, then wrote laboriously for some time.

When he had finished, he called Bernardo and gave him a heavy letter properly sealed and addressed, and a couple of pieces of gold.

"There is a ship to sail at high tide this evening," he said.

"It is so, *señor.*"

"This letter is to go on it. Take it to the ship's master and give him the payment. He will use care with the letter when he sees the address."

Don Carlos worked until the siesta hour. He retired to doze and rest, but his mind was too active for much sleep. He was imagining the consternation, the sensation which he was about to cause in Monterey.

Nor was that all. He had in his mind a picture of Señorita Inez de la Prado. Sweet and demure she had looked in her father's house, even as Fray Luis had declared her to be. Beautiful she was, without a doubt. And neither did Don Carlos doubt that she was courageous.

For he had known at the first glance that Señorita and Carmencita, the *cantina* dancer, were one and the same. The mask had not hidden her eyes, nor had it disguised her voice.

Morever, he knew that she was aware of his knowledge.

JUAN CAZZARA, the *magistrado* for the Monterey district, appointed by His Excellency the Governor, was a pompous individual with an overgrown sense of his own importance. Yet he

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realized that he was not the man he claimed to be, and lived in deadly fear of being exposed as an impostor.

He had offices and courtroom in a wing of the official building, and could be found there the greater part of the time. Only in an atmosphere of officialdom did he feel anywhere near sure of himself, and not particularly there.

Juan Cazzara was in his private lounging room adjoining his office, an apartment furnished luxuriously, where he had an assortment of rare wines, fruits and spiced candies, and a soft couch upon which to seek repose.

His repose this afternoon was interrupted by the entrance of his bailiff, whose manner of entrance was abrupt and whose eyes were bulging.

"Well, fellow," the *magistrado* demanded. "Why so goggle-eyed? And why disturb my rest?"

"He is here," the bailiff whispered. "Don Carlos de la Mendoza."

"Ha! So he is here. And for what?"

"He says he has official business with you, and demands to see you at once."

"Demands, does he? We shall be compelled to put him in his proper place at once. Hand me my robe."

Juan Cazzara grunted and got up off the couch, rubbed his sleepy eyes with his knuckles, yawned and allowed the bailiff to help him on with his robe. He straightened his shoulders, assumed what he thought was a stern expression, and waved his hand. The bailiff opened the door and intoned:

"His Excellency, Juan Cazzara, *magistrado* for the district of Monterey!"

Cazzara swept through the door like royalty about to ascend the throne, and saw Don Carlos standing near one of the windows. He cleared his throat when he got no immediate attention, and Don Carlos turned to face him.

"Did you not hear me announce, *señor?*" the *magistrado* demanded.

"Not properly, *señor,*" Don Carlos replied. "I heard somebody term you Excellency, and thought someone was having a jest, so did not turn to greet you. A *magistrado* does not enjoy the title of Excellency, and no doubt the Viceroy would be perturbed should he hear of one being so addressed."

"Indeed?" Juan Cazzara said. Not being sure of his ground, he did not care to debate the subject. And he knew this man had come from Mexico, and acted like a grandee—and spies were thick in the land.

"You wish to see me on business, Don Carlos?" he asked.

"I DO. First, *señor,* here are my credentials as an advocate and counselor, to show that I possess the qualifications to serve a litigant in your court."

"It is not necessary for me to read them, Don Carlos. You were certified as such to His Excellency the Governor when you first arrived in Alta California. I have heard that you have decided to remain in Monterey and pursue your profession, and I welcome you. When you have a cause to defend or prosecute, I shall be glad to entertain your official acts."

"I am here now, *señor,* to register complaint."

"I had hoped there would be no more business today. Can we not postpone it?"

"I believe not, *señor.* I have charges to file, and wish an authority of arrest to serve upon Capitán Zubiate, that he may bring my man to court."

"Ah, well!" Cazzara sat down at his desk, and motioned Don Carlos to a chair. "What is the business?"

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"A charge of fraud, of holding property illegally, of damages—"

"Ha! A major case, in fact. I adore major cases. Lately, there has been little but drunken natives and thieving small traders."

"This is the case of a thieving big trader," Don Carlos said, as he began putting documents upon the desk. "This case is of such importance—transgressing, as it does, the law even of the King himself—that I have written a digest of it and sent it to His Excellency the Viceroy in Mexico.

"If you will look through the window, *señor,* you will observe a ship sailing with the tide. She carries my letter to the Viceroy. And you may be sure he will expect to learn, by the ship following, what has been done in the matter."

Juan Cazzara did not like the ring in Don Carlos' voice. He sat up straight in his chair. "What is the business, and what is the name of the man you accuse?"

"Marcos Lopez."

"What is this? Lopez, you say? You charge Señor Marcos Lopez with various crimes and swindles? Have a care, *señor!* Perhaps you do not understand—"

"I understand the situation here in Monterey, if that is what you mean," Don Carlos interrupted. "And possibly the Viceroy understands it, and will understand it even better when he gets my letter. The wise official will cling to the letter of the law. You follow me, Señor Cazzara?"

Cazzara gulped. "Perfectly, Don Carlos," he replied.

"I charge that Marcos Lopez holds the property of Don Antonio de la Prado, meaning a *rancho,* illegally. I charge he acquired the property unlawfully, has retained it and so damaged my client, and by his illegal acts has barred himself from all recourse to recover.

"I demand his immediate body arrest, and that he be incarcerated until a cash bond is posted to the amount of three thousand pieces of gold—"

"This is madness!" Cazzara cried.

"It is law and justice, *señor.* Can you mean that you, a *magistrado,* refuse to aid me in a legal manner? Must the Viceroy learn that the appointees of His Excellency the Governor are not all they should be?"

"They'll flay me alive," Cazzara moaned.

"If there is a scandal, *señor,* would it not be better for you to appear as an exponent of law and justice? And legally, you cannot refuse to issue the orders on my complaint."

"That is true," Cazzara said, seeing the way out. "I'll order Marcos Lopez into court—"

"You will give me an order for his immediate arrest, and cause the cash bond to be collected and held against any damages my client may gain."

"I'LL give you the order of arrest, Don Carlos. That is my duty. But it is not my duty to arrest and incarcerate the man, thank the saints. How Capitán Zubiate will gulp and choke when he has the order!"

"I'll take the order to Capitán Zubiate personally, and see that it is carried out."

"So be it, Don Carlos. Wait until I fill out the form properly from your written complaint. Never let it be said that Juan Cazzara stood in a man's way when he wished to commit suicide in a spectacular manner."

Don Carlos walked over to the window and stood there looking out while the *magistrado* wrote his order. He

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turned back to the desk when Cazzara was done, and read the order carefully, and was satisfied.

"You will hold the hearing in the morning, *señor?*" Don Carlos asked.

"If the defendant is brought into court."

"Do not forget the cash bond which is required. And an order of seizure on any goods and chattels he may have in the district."

"So be it! I act only as the law commands. I am unable to help myself, even if I desired to do so. But I serve His Excellency the Viceroy—"

"You are a sensible man, Señor Cazzara," Don Carlos said. "If you serve anybody, let it be the best and highest."

Don Carlos bowed and went swiftly toward the door, the documents and court orders clutched in his hand. At the door, he bowed again before he disappeared. But Juan Cazzara sensed that the bow smacked of sarcasm.

He called the bailiff, who came hurrying from the other room, his mouth stuffed with fruit.

"Did you hear?" Cazzara demanded.

"I heard it all, *señor.*"

"This affair will be an earthquake. The Governor will rage. Marcos Lopez will have a stroke. But I could do nothing except grant the orders. I am merely the *magistrado,* is it not so?"

"That is true, *señor.*"

"This Don Carlos de la Mendoza has a way with him. He acts like a man used to having his commands obeyed. He has been strangely quiet since coming here. Now he establishes himself and comes forth with this earthquake.

"It might be wise to curry favor with him. He may stand high in the confidence of the Viceroy himself. Governors come and governors go, *amigo,* but the Viceroy goes on forever."

"That also is true, *señor.*"

"However, it is a wise man who has two handles to his wine mug. So, hurry you forth and find Marcos Lopez, and whisper into his ear what you have heard and seen here. I would not have him think I am his enemy—at least, not until he is crushed and without power. Be sure to say I was compelled to issue the orders."

"I understand, *señor,* and you can depend on me."

The bailiff hurried toward the door, but as he reached it the *magistrado* called to him again:

"As you pass the cantina of Pedro Pulido, drop in and whisper into the ear of the girl Juanita that I am alone and lonesome in my chambers, and that I have a piece of gold I wish to bestow upon somebody. A man must have some recreation after such an earthquake. Being a *magistrado* is fatiguing at times, but there is money in it."

CHAPTER IX

FRUIT-NIBBLER

IN HIS quarters at the *presidio,* Capitán Zubiate paced around the room with his hands clasped behind his back, digesting the reports of his spies. The activities of Don Carlos had concerned him.

He knew with what speed Don Carlos had bought a house and furnished it. On the surface, it looked as if Don Carlos were merely spending the gold he had won at Pedro Pulido's place to set himself up properly. But Zubiate thought there was something behind it.

He knew nothing of Don Carlos' poverty, and thought that the latter could at any time before have bought a residence had he desired to do so. This sudden activity on Don Carlos' part puzzled the *capitán.*

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He, too, thought it possible that Don Carlos was a secret emissary of the Viceroy, sent to Alta California to observe how things were going in official quarters. He had a natural animosity for Don Carlos, which he could not hide, based primarily on a feeling of inferiority in the Mendoza's presence.

He had to decide on a course of action: whether to be courteous to Don Carlos and get in his good graces, or maintain a stand against him and cling to those with whom he had cast his lot.

He inclined to the latter. If Don Carlos was in reality the Viceroy's man, he was alone here in Alta California, and the Viceroy was far away. If anything happened to prevent Don Carlos' making a personal report, the facts about what happened here could be distorted to suit the occasion before they reached the Viceroy's court in Mexico.

Zubiate stopped before a window and glanced out, in time to see a carriage approaching the entrance of the *presidio,* with a huge man driving and Don Carlos de la Mendoza himself sitting erect on the cushions.

"He is coming here," Zubiate muttered, like a man who cannot believe his own words.

He clapped his hands, and a trooper entered and stood at attention.

"Don Carlos de la Mendoza approaches the *presidio,*" Zubiate said. "See that he is received properly and conducted at once to my quarters."

The trooper disappeared, and Zubiate buckled on his sword and adjusted the sash beneath the belt, buttoned his tunic and waited. His face was inscrutable when he turned to greet his visitor.

"Be seated, Don Carlos," he said, gesturing toward a bench at the end of the long table in the middle of the room. "You finally have come to lodge complaint against those who attacked you a few evenings ago?"

"You seem to forget, *capitán.* I said at the time that I washed my hands of that affair. I am here as an advocate to hand you an order of arrest and incarceration which I have obtained from the *magistrado.*"

"Ah! So you are going about your business of being an advocate seriously?"

"Quite true," Don Carlos said, spreading out his documents. "In this case, *capitán,* there are several elements which are rather sensational. I wrote a report of the case and sent it to Mexico on the ship which sailed an hour ago. On the next ship, I shall send a report of what has been done in the matter."

Zubiate's eyes met his squarely. "It must indeed be an important case," he said.

"HERE is the order for arrest and incarceration, Capitán Zubiate. There is also an order, you will observe, for a cash bond of three thousand pieces of gold, and for seizure of certain chattels and properties, to be held in trust until this case has had final disposition."

Capitán Zubiate seized the documents and perused them swiftly.

"Marcos Lopez!" he cried. "You cannot be serious, *señor.*"

"I assure you that I am."

"But this case— It is an old affair and was settled some time ago."

"It is an old affair, but it is not settled yet," Don Carlos replied.

"This is but a matter of form, of course. You do not expect actual arrest and incarceration, I take it. Merely a notification to the accused to appear?"

"Actual arrest and incarceration is what the order stipulates, *señor.*"

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"But Señor Lopez is a man of substance."

"All men are equal under the King's law, *señor*. Do you deny it?" Don Carlos demanded. "Am I to understand that you refuse to do your duty and execute the formal order of a *magistrado?*"

Capitán Zubiate shrugged his shoulders. "Since Señor Cazzara has issued this order, it will be served," he replied. "I have no alternative."

"Quite proper, *capitán*. Allow me to suggest that if any special favor is shown the accused, the fact will be reported in the right quarter. I expect him to be arrested and incarcerated, and the cash bond posted."

Zubiate bowed. "I shall attend to it immediately," he replied.

"In the interests of my client, it is my duty and also my privilege as an advocate to appear here at the proper time and observe that the accused is actually behind bars. Shall we say in an hour or so, *capitán?*"

"If I can locate the man."

"If you and your troopers cannot find a man like Marcos Lopez, whose every movement is announced with a blare of trumpets, so to speak, His Excellency should be served better."

"I do not need you, Don Carlos, nor any man, to tell me how to go about my duties."

"I hope not," Don Carlos said, softly. "I will leave you now, so as not to deter you from the prompt execution of those duties you mention."

CAPITÁN ZUBIATE'S face was suffused with rage as Don Carlos departed. He paced around the room for a short time, considering what to do. He decided it would be better at the moment to stick to the letter of the law.

Calling his sergeant, he ordered that four troopers be assigned to accompany him, mounted his horse, and rode slowly away from the *presidio* with the armed troopers dogtrotting at his mount's heels.

Marcos Lopez was at his own *casa*, indulging in a light repast after his siesta. He sprang to his feet when Capitán Zubiate was ushered in with the troopers at his back.

"Greetings, *capitán!*" Lopez cried. "You are welcome. But why bring the army with you?"

"The visit is official, Lopez, my friend. I have an order for your arrest and incarceration."

Marcos Lopez tossed up his head and laughed raucously. "A jest!" he cried. "Seriously—"

"But I am serious, *amigo*. Here are the documents. You may peruse them."

Marcos Lopez read swiftly, and his face became a thundercloud.

"That accursed Don Antonio!" he roared, when he had finished. "The thrice accursed Don Carlos! That dolt of a *magistrado!* And you, *capitán!* You dare—"

"Softly, *amigo!*" Zubiate said. "Let us consider. I was infuriated at first myself, and felt like cutting off Señor Cazzara's ears. But perhaps the dolt has shown a measure of good sense for once."

"How is this?"

"How would it have looked had he refused to comply with Don Carlos' demands? He would have been flouting the King's law. And who knows but what this Don Carlos is the representative of one in a high place? So Señor Cazzara gives him the order, and hence does his duty. I come here to make the arrest, and hence do mine.

"But the hearing will be before Señor Cazzara, will it not? And the

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decision in the matter will rest with the *magistrado*. He decides in your favor, the case is closed, and Don Carlos has his guns spiked. And, *amigo*, we can attend to this Don Carlos later, can we not?"

"We can!" Lopez agreed.

"Let us play the game then, *amigo*. I put you in a cell, and you post your three thousand pieces of gold for release. It is a matter of form, a little inconvenience no doubt. But we shall triumph in the end."

"I shall know how to deal with Don Carlos later."

"Report will go to Mexico that everything was carried out to the letter of the law. So His Excellency the Governor, our very good friend, will suffer no embarrassment. The Viceroy will believe that things are being run properly here, and we shall not be bothered more—at least not for some time."

"I am ready to accompany you," Marcos Lopez said. "Do you wish to iron me?"

"That is unnecessary, *señor*. Do not forget the gold. A cash bond, the order says. For your properties are to be seized and held also."

"*Dios!*" Lopez roared. "How this Don Carlos shall be made to pay!"

"Only a little inconvenience. When the *magistrado* decides against him, it will make Don Carlos appear as a sorry advocate. Men will scoff at his ability. And perhaps we can find some way to cause him trouble in return, cause him to be derided and shamed . . . before we finish him."

MARCOS LOPEZ had a quantity of gold in his house, for many of his transactions were such that actual gold was needed quickly. He retired with Zubiate to his strong room, and counted out the amount, sacked it, and had servants carry it to his carriage, which he had ordered made ready.

So they went to the *presidio*, Marcos Lopez riding in his carriage, Zubiate on his horse beside it, and the troopers dogtrotting in the dust.

With a jest, Zubiate locked Lopez behind bars, then took the gold to the *magistrado's* court to deposit it and obtain an order for Lopez' release. Señor Cazzara came from his private room quickly to greet him, leaving the girl Juanita there nibbling fruit.

"This is a sorry business, Cazzara," Zubiate declared.

"What could I do but comply with the request?"

"Nothing. We have both obeyed the law. Marcos Lopez is behind bars, but here is the gold bond for his release. Take it and give me the order. Then we have complied with the regulations. At the hearing in the morning, you can clip this Don Carlos' wings."

"He is a dangerous man," Cazzara said.

"Lopez will have him handled after this affair is over. Also, he undoubtedly will bring the remainder of old Don Antonio's house tumbling about his ears by way of revenge. Dispose of the case quickly tomorrow and end the matter.

"Make this Don Carlos look a fool in court. Rebuke him for bringing up an old affair which was settled once before. Suggest that Señor Lopez bring an action against him for false arrest. Now count the gold, and give me the order for Señor Lopez' release."

"You do not understand, *capitán*. The gold is not by way of personal bail. It is to be held for use if judgment is entered against Lopez. Also his properties, which you are to put under seizure immediately."

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"You mean I cannot release Lopez?"

"Certainly not. He must remain incarcerated until the case is decided, for this constitutes a criminal complaint against him also."

"*Dios!* How he will rave!"

"I can do nothing else, *capitán*. Nor can you. Explain to Lopez that, if we stand by the law now, there can be no complaint. And let him have his way with Don Carlos afterward."

"He will do that, never fear. He has not forgotten that scene in the *cantina*. Both Don Carlos and the young Don José Sentous are to feel the weight of his displeasure, for daring to oppose him as they did."

Cazzara counted the gold, gave the *capitán* a receipt for it, and stored the gold away. He walked with Zubiate to the door.

"Calm our friend as much as possible," Cazzara said. "Make him comfortable for the night. Let him use your own quarters."

"Don Carlos will appear at the *presidio* to see how he fares, and will insist that he be kept in a cell."

"Give him good food, then, and plenty of wine. I would not be in this Don Carlos' shoes when Señor Lopez is at liberty again."

"Nor in those of young Don José," Zubiate added. "Lopez is but waiting for an opportunity to punish that stripling. He hates all men of noble blood. He will have Don José openly disgraced in some manner, and then probably have him slain."

"One would not expect him to do the slaying himself," the *magistrado* said. "It would be a perilous undertaking. For a mere youth, this Don José is quite expert with a blade. More likely the boy will be found some day by fishermen, floating in the bay with his throat cut."

Capitán Zubiate hurried away, and Cazzara closed the door and waddled back toward his private room, where he had left Juanita, the cantina girl, nibbling fruit.

He did not know that Juanita had been listening and had heard all. Nor did he know that she had a wild infatuation for the unattainable Don José Sentous.

CHAPTER X

DELAYED TRIUMPH

THE *magistrado's* court of Monterey opened the following morning with two-thirds of the men of importance in the district jammed inside its four walls. Peons and natives, who knew only that a case of importance was being tried, crowding around the windows and doors.

Juan Cazzara felt his importance as he ascended the bench and settled his judicial robe about his shoulders. He frowned at those who crowded the courtroom, and appeared bored as his clerk read the long charges Don Carlos had made.

At one end of a long table, Marcos Lopez sat in a chair like a fat toad, flashing his teeth in smiles of derision as he listened, and an advocate he had engaged bent toward him and whispered continually.

At the end of a second long table, old Don Antonio de la Prado sat in a chair with cushions heaped around him—a sick old man rather bewildered by the scene.

"May I say to the honored court that this is a simple matter which need not occupy much of the court's time," Don Carlos said.

Those in the room stiffened at that. A simple matter—and they had thought this was a case of importance.

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"Señor Marcos Lopez claimed debt against Don Antonio de la Prado to the extent of twenty-five hundred pieces of gold. He alleged that he had purchased the debt from another, now deceased. We admit the existence of the original debt, which was one of kindness and friendship, and not a debt of record. We admit that Señor Lopez purchased the debt from the heir of the man to whom it was owed."

"Allow me to thank the advocate for a clear statement of fact," Lopez' counselor spoke up. "He admits the debt existed."

"To liquidate this debt, Señor Lopez seized upon and caused to be given him in payment a certain *rancho,* description of which appears in the bill of charges. Friends of my litigant raised the amount of the debt and tendered it, but Señor Lopez refused the gold and demanded the land. Is that correct?"

"It is correct," Lopez' counselor admitted. "My client preferred the land to the gold."

Don Carlos' eyes glittered as he turned to face the pompous man on the bench; and then, as Cazzara looked straight at him, he smiled slightly as if to indicate to the *magistrado* that here was something so simple it was not worthy of his attention.

"The honored and learned court," Don Carlos said, "will be able, I feel sure, to adjudicate this cause quickly, for no doubt the court is thoroughly acquainted with the King's laws.

"The ranch in question formed part of a Royal Grant of land to Don Antonio de la Prado, to be held by him and his direct heirs of blood as long as the world endures, with the provision that, should the line die out, the land and all improvements would revert to the Crown. I display to the honorable court this copy of the Royal Grant."

A STIR ran through the audience as Don Carlos stepped up and handed a document to Juan Cazzara. The latter read it.

"It is so," he judged.

"Hence, neither Marcos Lopez nor any other man could legally take the land from Don Antonio. Its title rests with him and his family as long as that family endures. But Señor Lopez seized this land, made certain changes which he called improvements, denied Don Antonio the rights and benefits of it.

"Hence we ask that he be ejected from the property and that it be returned to Don Antonio, and that the court award damages to my client in the sum of three thousand pieces of gold."

Lopez' counselor sprang to his feet.

"If the honorable court please, my client was ignorant of the facts. He did not know the *rancho* was part of a Royal Grant, but thought it had been acquired by Don Antonio through purchase. He is willing to return the property to Don Antonio, as it is, without charge for the improvements he has made, and take instead the amount of the original debt, twenty-five hundred pieces of gold."

Don Carlos smiled at him and turned to the court again.

"It is a well-known phrase of King's law that if a man offer to pay an honest debt with coin of the realm, and payment is refused, said debt is cancelled and cannot be claimed again. At the time Señor Lopez seized the land, he was offered the amount in gold and refused it. Hence, the debt is cancelled."

"How is this?" Lopez howled,

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thrusting his advocate aside as he sprang to his feet. "I must return the *rancho,* yet cannot collect my twenty-five hundred pieces of gold?"

"That is true, *señor,*" Don Carlos replied, coldly. "But that is not all. For unlawful detention of the land and for making certain alterations of the buildings and fences thereon, I claim damages for my client in the amount of three thousand pieces of gold. I feel we are very lenient in the matter. The law is plain, as the honorable court well knows."

He turned and bowed to Cazzara.

"Lose the land—the amount of my debt—and be fined as well," Lopez stammered.

"The way of the transgressor, *señor,* ends in disaster," Don Carlos said.

"I resent that remark," Lopez cried. "I resent this entire affair. It is a farce!"

"The court knows the law," Don Carlos said, facing Cazzara and looking him straight in the eyes. "The court knows he must render judgment as I have stipulated, for in this case there can be no argument. The facts are plain. This court stands for law and justice, I feel sure, and I am equally sure that this court would not offend the Viceroy by failing to administer justice and leaving itself open for punishment. What says the court?"

Juan Cazzara's mind was the arena of bewilderment. Don Carlos had the law. The court's duty was plain. But Marcos Lopez and those associated with him had certain powers, also.

Cazzara had a decision to make. He eyed Don Carlos, who smiled slightly at him again, and did not like the smile. There seemed to be a hidden meaning in it.

"Don Antonio's distinguished advocate appears to have the rights of this matter," Cazzara said. "At this moment, it seems judgment must be rendered as he has said. But the court reserves the right to take time to investigate the authorities of law for itself.

"The court will take a recess until this same time tomorrow morning, at which time all principals must be present, and all advocates. If any is absent the court will declare his suit void."

Cazzara glanced at Marcos Lopez as he spoke that last line. It was the ordinary line spoken as usual at such moments, but now it seemed to have a special meaning.

"I instruct the illustrious advocate for Don Antonio to draw up and have ready a bill of judgment, that I may sign it tomorrow if said judgment is in his favor," Cazzara added.

"Señor Lopez, the defendant herein, is released in the custody of Capitán Zubiate, who will be responsible for his appearance in this court tomorrow morning. We now take recess."

DON CARLOS took Don Antonio out to his house in his carriage. The elderly grandee was panting with excitement.

"You have conquered them, *amigo,*" he declared. "You have outdone the rascals. You have dared stand against them. I owe you eternal gratitude."

"You owe me nothing, Don Antonio. Of the three thousand pieces of gold which will undoubtedly come to you as damages, I'll take five hundred for myself, that is all."

"You shall have the half of it, at least."

"Five hundred pieces only, Don Antonio. For your cause has given me an opportunity to show my ability as an advocate."

When they reached Don Antonio's place, Don Carlos helped him into the

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house, and the *señorita* came running with her old *dueña* panting behind her, and a hundred questions bubbling on her lips. She heard the story from her father, and the look she gave Don Carlos was reward enough.

Again, they had a word alone together while the old servant was making Don Antonio comfortable and the *dueña* was helping.

"I never can thank you enough, Don Carlos," she said. "It means so much to us."

"If my work has brought you even an instant of happiness, *señorita,* I am content."

"We can hold up our heads again. We can repair our house, and stock it well, and live as we should live. It will cure my father's illness, for it is greatly of the mind. He has felt our ill fortune keenly."

For an instant, perhaps by accident, her hand touched that of Don Carlos, and a thrill ran through him. Her head was lifted high as she swayed slightly toward him.

That graceful movement . . . he had seen it before. And the breath of perfume which reached him . . . he had sensed that before, too. There was no doubt of it, Señorita Inez de la Prado was also Carmencita, the *cantina* singer.

"I shall be happy if your repaired fortunes enable you to live as you should," Don Carlos said. "When one does not have a feeling of security, one sometimes is compelled to do things which would not be done otherwise."

"That is quite true, *señor.* You—know?"

"I know, *señorita.*"

"What must you think of me!"

"I think you are delightfully courageous. I think you have come through dangers unscathed. Discovery would have meant lost caste. But happily there will be no further danger. The *cantina* singer will simply disappear, I take it. No doubt, Pedro Pulido will give out that she has gone to San Francisco de Asis, or possibly to Mexico on the ship which sailed yesterday."

"That would be best," she whispered. "Now that it is over, I tremble to think what discovery would have meant. The shame would have killed my father, and ruined me forever with those of my own kind. It was a fortunate moment for me *señor,* when I knocked on the door of your room."

"More fortunate for me, *señorita.*"

"Good fortune has seemed to flow toward me from the moment I met you. And toward you also. Your winnings at the *cantina,* your escape when you were attacked by rogues, your victory in the court today— It makes one feel, *señor,* that some power is protecting you, working for your best interests."

DON CARLOS left a moment later, and carried that thought with him. As he leaned back in his carriage and watched the broad back of Bernardo, who was driving, his fingers went into a little pocket of his jacket and felt of the five doubloons. He had picked them out of his store of gold to keep with him always.

Fray Luis' words regarding them and the letter he had received seemed sound of sense, yet Don Carlos wondered. Perhaps there were forces which not even a *fray* could understand.

If El Diablo had the power to ruin men, was it not possible that he could by some means leave written letters and queer gold coins about? Might he not lure a man to his destruction by building up his estate and reputation, then in some strange manner make him pay for his prosperity?

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Don Carlos knew he would have no peace of mind until he knew the truth, until he was apprised what man had sent him the doubloons, if a human had.

The carriage stopped before the front door of Don Carlos' new home, and he told Bernardo to have the horses put away. The door opened for him, and he strode in, stripping off his gloves. A visitor stood up and approached him.

"Don Carlos, I have been waiting for you. I thought you never would come. I have important information for you," an eager voice rang.

He saw Don José Sentous bowing before him.

CHAPTER XI

HOME TO DISASTER

DON JOSE was excited. His face was flushed, and Don Carlos knew he had difficulty holding back words.

He took the boy by the arm and escorted him to a corner where there were a divan and a couple of easy chairs; gestured for the nearest servant to bring wine and fruit.

"Now, *amigo,* what is your tale?" Don Carlos asked. "Why are you so excited?"

"In Pedro Pulido's *cantina* there is a girl named Juanita—"

"I have met her. Do you mean to intimate, *señor,* that an affair with a *cantina* girl can get you excited."

"It is not that, Don Carlos. The wench follows me with her eyes whenever I am near her. She speaks to me at every chance. She told me boldly that she worshipped me. Yet there is nothing sordid in it. Can you imagine such a girl, *señor,* having a true love for a man?"

"Such sometimes do," Don Carlos replied. "It is a queer strain in them. They pick a man, generally far above them in caste, one unattainable, and have him for an idol. In a way, it is perhaps a species of atonement for the lives they lead. They like to think that can have a pure interest. But to what does this lead, *amigo?*"

"She sent me word not long ago that she must see me on a matter of life or death. Some whim impelled me to the rendezvous. She wanted to warn me, and for me to warn you."

"Explain."

"She confessed that she had answered a summons yesterday from Juan Cazzara, the *magistrado,* who has a fancy for her at times. She was there when Capitán Zubiate called on Cazzara and gave him the cash bond. She overheard them talking."

"To what end?" Don Carlos asked.

"According to what she overheard, Marcos Lopez is to have us both slain. Cazzara said I would perhaps be found floating in the bay with my throat cut. And he is planning your disgrace and death, also."

"No doubt," Don Carlos observed.

"He hates you for the manner in which you handled him in the *cantina.* And after what you have done to him in court, he will use every means to undo you. He has rogues at his command, as you know already."

"Both rascals and men of position," Don Carlos agreed. "No doubt he would like to have me removed from the world of the living before tomorrow, at which time I am to appear in court. If I do not, it will give the *magistrado* an excuse to disallow Don Antonio's claim."

"We must use every care, Don Carlos," the boy said.

"I have a personal servant, Bernardo, who will walk at my back. He is a veteran of native uprisings. And you?"

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"I must care for myself."

"Do not place yourself in a position where you can be attacked," Don Carlos advised. "Do not be caught off guard. Carry a pistol with you always."

"I have none. I detest firearms."

"They are not the weapons of a gentleman, it is true, but can be of great service at times. Now, Don José, I would be honored if you would remain and dine with me."

"I was hoping you would ask me," the boy confessed, his eyes twinkling. "I am eager to see your house."

DON CARLOS walked with him through the establishment, and then they went out upon the balcony. They could look out over the sparkling bay, where several ships rode at anchor. Don Carlos pointed to one.

"She is filling her water casks," he observed. "She will sail at dawn for the Sandwich Islands. They are a far distance to the westward. The bronze natives run naked and eat queer foods."

"She looks like a foul ship," Don José said.

"With a crew of brutish fellows, no doubt, and their captain but little better. I have no wish to take a voyage on her."

"When will you go to Pedro Pulido's again?" the boy asked.

"I do not visit the place often."

"Not even to see Carmencita?"

"She does not dance there every night, I have been told."

"That is true. A man never knows when she will appear. So those interested go almost every night, hoping to see her. It is good for Pedro Pulido's business."

"You are interested in the *señorita?*" Don Carlos asked.

"I adore her, *señor.*"

"Nonsense! It is merely an infatuation. The mystery of her mask draws you. 'Tis not the *señorita* you adore. She simply represents to you the girl you hope to meet some day."

"There is something about her that sets my blood afire."

"It is her voice, and her dancing. No doubt she is older than you."

"You rushed to her defense the other evening."

"And would again," Don Carlos admitted. "As I would rush to the defense of any woman being annoyed by a ruffian. And so would you. There does not have to be anything strictly personal in a common act of chivalry."

"You seem to be seeking to turn my thoughts from her," Don José said. "Perhaps your own interest in her is so great—"

Don Carlos laughed. "Woo her desperately, *amigo,* without fear of offending me," he replied. "When you see her again."

In time, they dined. Then Don José departed, with Don Carlos' warning in his ears that he should beware traps. Don Carlos stretched himself on his couch to enjoy a siesta, for he was tired and the day was hot.

He slept, awoke and arose to have Bernardo sponge him with cool water, dressed afresh and went to his study room. He had the judgment to write out, and that would take considerable time.

THE candles were burning before he had finished his work. He got up from his desk, and stretched, paced around the room, finally went out upon the balcony. Bernardo followed him.

"Do not fetch the candelabra," Don Carlos instructed. "I enjoy the moonlight. But bring me cakes and wine."

He relaxed in a huge chair with a cushion at his back, and looked up at

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the swimming stars. Bernardo put wine and a tray of small spiced cakes at his elbow, and he ate and drank.

He listened to the voices of the town . . . dogs barking in the distance, children calling in shrill voices, and the raucous voices of men as they hurried along the street just outside his patio wall.

Two voices he could hear plainly:

"To Pedro Pulidos *amigo?* I'll go along with you. But how do you know Carmencita will dance tonight?"

"Pulido himself told a friend of mine. It is said this will be her last appearance for some time; that she is going on a journey. Marcos Lopez and Capitán Zubiate will have this last chance to win her attention."

The men walked on. Don Carlos had straightened in his chair. Carmencita to dance? What folly was this? She had told him nothing of such an intention when he had seen her that day.

But perhaps Pulido was taking this means to erase her from the scene. Perhaps he had given out that she would dance a last time before leaving Monterey, and later would announce that she had gone elsewhere.

Don Carlos had a sudden fear for her. Marcos Lopez and Capitán Zubiate were both without scruples. Suppose they affronted her in the *cantina,* or made an attempt to have her abducted?

In any event, if Carmencita was to dance a last time, Don Carlos wanted to watch her. Regardless of how much he might see Señorita Inez de la Prado in the future, he sensed she would never be quite the same as Carmencita. She took off that fiery personality with her mask, no doubt.

"Bernardo!" he called.

"Don Carlos?"

"I am going to Pulidos *cantina.* You will walk at my back, and be alert. You will stand near me always while I am in the place."

"*Si,* Don Carlos. I understand."

DON CARLOS went to his dressing room and buckled on his blade. He had decided to go afoot, for the night was fine, and it was not a great distance from his house to the *cantina.* So he set out, with the giant Bernardo a pace behind him, hand on dagger and eyes piercing the shadows on either side of them.

There were dark spots through which they were compelled to pass, but no foes rushed at them from the darkness. Don Carlos reached the *cantina* safely. Men he did not know greeted him by name, for news of his work in court had got abroad. Others whispered his identity as he passed them.

With Bernardo close behind him, Don Carlos went the length of the room toward Pedro Pulido's office. As he approached it, the door opened and Pulido confronted him.

"Ho, Don Carlos!" he greeted. "Welcome to my pigsty! You have been making a name for yourself in court, I understand."

"May I have a word with you, *señor?*" Don Carlos asked.

"I am honored."

"Remain here outside the door, Bernardo."

Don Carlos stepped inside, and Pulido closed the door.

"I am rejoiced at what you did today," Pulido said. "I admire old Don Antonio—"

"So much that you subject his daughter to danger!" Don Carlos said, in a low voice.

"How is this?"

"Have you not announced that Carmencita will sing and dance tonight, before leaving Monterey? I heard of it

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from a couple of men passing in the street. Have you no sense of the proprieties, Señor Pulido? You place her in grave danger from men who do not know her identity, who would think it not amiss to abduct a *cantina* girl. She does not need the gold now. She reaped a harvest the last time she sang, and her family affairs now are—"

"Softly, Don Carlos," Pulido begged. "I do not understand any of this."

"I understand, *señor*. No doubt you played on her gratitude. No doubt you explained to her that your takings tonight would be large if she sang and danced, and that she owed it to you—"

"So that is what you think of me, Don Carlos."

The man looked without anger into Don Carlos' face.

"What else can I think?"

"Perhaps you are not to be blamed, overhearing what you did. But the truth is, *señor*, that I have not communicated with Carmencita since the night you saw her here. She certainly is not to sing and dance tonight. I would not permit it even if she requested to do so. A false rumor must have got out. I had nothing to do with it."

"Then I beg your pardon for my outburst, *señor*."

"It is granted instantly, Don Carlos. From your speech, I deduce you have learned the lady's true identity."

"I have," Don Carlos said.

"I only regret that you think I am the sort of man who would do what you have intimated. I have known the *señorita* long in a humble way. She suggested singing and dancing here, and at first I opposed the idea. But she needed gold—"

"Say no more, *señor*. I regret that I misjudged you. I will return home, for I have more work to do."

"You have no itch to try your luck at the tables?"

Don Carlos smiled. "Not this evening," he replied. "The fever is not in my body."

Pulido nodded, smiling, too.

"I am glad for that, Don Carlos."

THEY drank wine together, and Don Carlos went out of the office and into the main room of the *cantina*, with the faithful Bernardo behind him. One of the girls was dancing, and the attention of the patrons was centered on the stage.

Don Carlos felt a surge of relief as he walked along the dusty streets. He hummed a song lightly . . . and realized it was the lullaby the *señorita* had sung for him in the *cantina* that other night.

"I wonder," Don Carlos mused, "if I am falling in love. Perhaps so. It could not be with a more charming lady."

They passed safely through several treacherous dark spots and approached Don Carlos' house. It was as they went along the patio wall toward the gate, through the deep shadows, that disaster struck.

The attack was swift, and undoubtedly carefully planned. Don Carlos did not have time to whip his blade out of its scabbard. Bernardo received full and immediate attention from the assailants. Don Carlos saw him go to earth, and an instant later he himself sank as his head seemed to explode beneath a smashing blow.

His last thought was that he had been tricked into leaving his house, by the two men who had stood beneath his balcony and talked of Carmencita's being expected to dance at the *cantina*.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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The Gorgon had jerked the rein from Bill and was coming on with bounds that shook the countryside. Sandra made the bicycle shed just in time

The Gift Horse

Well, it seems there was a girl named Sandra and a horse named Muriel. One a wow, one a flat tire. But the triumph of both was due mainly to the fact that you can't look a gift horse in the mouth without getting bitten

By JOHN KENT
Author of "Little Victory"

EVEN if I did buy two horses in Bombay instead of one and spend two thousand rupees instead of fifteen hundred, there was no need for Bill to be so stuffy about it. We hadn't got any money at all so, in any case, the extra five hundred rupees didn't make much difference.

As to the second horse, the Arab dealer who lives behind the docks wouldn't let me have The Gorgon unless I bought the other brute as well. And anyhow it was all the fault of Sandra Playle: the United States has no right to loose girls like Sandra on a nice quiet country like India at the best of times.

And when Sandra arrived in the upcountry station of Chota Bokhar, it was anything but the best of times—financially, that is.

Sandra had a good look at Chota Bokhar, which consisted of the cavalry lines (where Bill and I were stationed), several miles of sand and a couple of trees which looked like broken umbrellas, and said

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the place beat Hell. Bill said: "You Americans seem to get everywhere."

But we were all delighted when she announced she would stay for a few months with the Ansoms on account of she was going to write a book about India. In fact, we forgave her even that, or while Sandra had been taking a good look at Chota Bokhar, Chota Bokhar had been reciprocating the compliment.

And it was unanimously decided that there wasn't anything better to look at in India, including the Taj Mahal by moonlight and the view of Bombay harbor over the stern of a homeward bound liner.

You see, Sandra was one of the seven living girls who can wear jodhpur breeches without conveying the impression that their legs are perfect cylinders from knee to ankle. In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, Sandra Playle was a wow.

BUT to turn from the sublime to the ridiculous, Bill and I were having a row with the bank about the time Sandra arrived. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that we and the bank were saying ruder things than usual to each other.

For Bill (his real name was Captain the Honorable William Ffolliott D'Arcy Broadacres, pronounced *Brokers*) was the younger son of a peer. And I hadn't any money either. But we'd always managed to run a more or less successful racing stable and had owned, trained and ridden a respectable number of winners since we both joined the Fiftieth Deccani Lancers as subaltern officers.

But of course it had been a struggle, in which the odds were generally heavily in the bank's favor.

As economists, we were probably very good soldiers. Our ideas on the monetary theory would have made an interesting if slightly ribald thesis. In fact, money was mainly theoretical with us. In practice it was a floating asset; floating just out of reach. It remained an unknown quantity until such time as the bank wrote, about once a month, "inviting our attention" to our overdraft and asking us kindly to let them have "some idea when this long outstanding debit balance might be adjusted."

And when we answered, quite honestly, "No idea," they got peevish and started appealing to our Better Nature till we got so sorry for them we could have cried. We even offered to let them have Weazleface, an old screw past mark of mouth which was all that was left in our stables, as security. But the manager said he couldn't lock Weazleface up in the bank's vaults.

So it began to look as if the only thing that could save us would be a nice war. But either Herr Hitler was having a rest or Mr. Chamberlain was working overtime; anyhow, even that prospect was momentarily remote.

It was the night Bill refused to make a fourth at bridge at the Gymkhana Club that Sandra took a hand in our affairs. Bill said: "I'm sorry, but I shan't be able to play tonight. Got to write a letter to the bank." And he added a few things about the bank, the more lurid of which were fortunately in Hindistani.

"They say we're heavily overdrawn," he concluded. "That's fantastic: I've still got about a dozen checks left. So I'm going to write and give 'em what for."

Sandra said dreamily that we ought to be kind to our banker. She'd once had a bank, she explained, and it hadn't been so hot. Either she was overflowing with the milk of human kindness or else she was thinking about baccarat. Four hours later, however, Mrs. Ansom suggested we should all go over to Bill's quarters and see how he was getting along. And the sight of Bill in his shirtsleeves, surrounded by crumpled sheets of notepaper and with his latest effort before him on his desk (inscribed quite simply: "I say, bank") so moved Sandra that she said she wanted to see us both in the club veranda after parade next morning.

"What you want," said Sandra firmly, when we foregathered in the veranda, "is fresh blood."

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"That's easy," said Bill. "Send the bank a couple of stones and they'll probably produce a gallon or two. No; let's get this thing straight. Our fortunes are—"

I coughed loudly. "I wasn't going to say anything Sandra shouldn't hear," Bill protested.

"Then you couldn't have been going to describe our fortunes adequately," I pointed out.

"When you-all have finished," Sandra went on patiently, "I was going to suggest you buy yourself a new race horse."

WE BOTH looked at her sympathetically. India gets people that way sometimes. It's the sun. Then Bill said very slowly: "That's a grand idea, Sandra. The only thing against it is that we haven't any money. We have no cash, if you want it is-words of one syllable. You explain to Sandra. I give up."

"But you have," Sandra persisted. She began to speak rapidly. "You see, I've always wanted to own a race horse. In fact, my book is going to be about a race horse. So I thought if you two would train it and ride it, I'd kind of finance it. So I fixed it with the bank this morning . . . and will you please both stop looking at me that way?"

"Sandra, how could you?" I demanded.

"Easily. The bank was nice about it."

Bill broke in with: "But you can't do that." And Sandra retorted: "But I've done it. Let's talk about the future. Now I'm a partner in this racket, I suggest we all have a drink."

Well, we'd been lucky with the ponies we'd trained. Given a raw pony purchased for fifteen hundred rupees (for Sandra had put five hundred dollars in the bank—a hundred English pounds), we stood a very sporting chance of making a substantial profit on her investment: a profit which, she insisted, should be pooled. We made a mental reservation about that, but the fact that we were playing with her money made us all the more determined to win out on it.

Eventually it was decided that I should get ten days leave and go to Bombay to buy our embryo winner. Bill was the better judge of horseflesh but he said: "I've got my name written all over the leave book and I simply daren't ask for another ten days. It's a pity, because you always make a mess of everything you handle; but you'll have to go, Scruffy."

(I'd tired, long ago, of protesting at the name Scruffy. Actually, my name was even longer than Bill's.)

Naturally, in the face of that unjustified attack on my perspicacity, I didn't admit, when I got back, that I'd spent five hundred rupees too much and bought two ponies instead of one.

I'd managed to borrow enough off the steward at the Bombay Yacht Club to pay for a cable to my aunt in England asking her to cover my check for the extra five hundred rupees, and I'd decided to explain away the second horse by making it a gift to Sandra.

At first I'd thought wildly of suggesting it had happened naturally in the horse box on the way up. But that phenomenon would have been too astonishing even for India, which is the land of tall stories. Especially as The Gorgon (I'd tentatively named the race horse that on account of the dirty look he gave me whenever I went near him) was a horse.

BECAUSE of a slight miscalculation of the train timings, unjustly attributed to me, the horse box had been backed into the siding by the time the three of us arrived at the Chota Bokhar Railway station to meet the ponies.

On the way, I contented myself with promising them a surprise when they saw my purchase; I felt pretty safe in doing that. As a matter of fact, we heard the horse box before we saw it. As we turned off the road:

"Hark," said Sandra; "is that guns?"

"Some sort of show in the bazaar, I expect," Bill explained casually. "You know how they love beating drums." The thun-

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derous tattoo from the direction of the railway siding grew louder.

"It—it couldn't be a horse kicking a horse box to splinters, by any chance?" Sandra asked, as we entered the station approach. There was no need to reply to this. The quaking horse box testified, anything but mutely, to the accuracy of her guess. We climbed out of the car in silence.

At last, with the aid of the groom we'd brought and by the offer of substantial compensation to the dependents of such railway employees as should be killed in the enterprise, we got the drop side of the box down and gingerly swung back the two half doors. Sandra said she was prepared for the worst. Bill took a look inside the horse box and said: "Well, you've got it."

Then, to an obbligato of detonations from within, there emerged the most amiable, docile, ill-groomed and well-mannered mare any of us had ever encountered.

I broke the startled silence. "There," I said triumphantly, "I bought her for you, Sandra." I tried to beam at them. "As a surprise," I added unhappily.

"A screw like that would be a surprise anywhere," Bill growled. But it was nothing to the surprise he got when he entered the box and unhitched its second occupant.

When the dust had cleared, the spectators, perched on various points of vantage round the station yard, gazed in awestruck wonder at my second purchase, straining away from the lunging rein which Bill still gripped. Then:

"That's the race horse," I explained. I spoke from the top of the goods shed, and Sandra called back from the roof of the bicycle shelter: "Did the Arab dealer tell you that?"

"So that's a race horse," Bill said bitterly. "And I suppose the other is something out of a jumble sale just upholstered in horse skin? Sandra, which is the one he said he was giving you?"

"I think it was the one that's roughly horse shaped," said Sandra, climbing off the shelter. "You know, if you took the good points of both, you could make quite a tolerable horse, Bill."

"And if you took the bad points of both, you could make a gun team of six nightmares," Bill answered.

"The first one reminds me of something," Sandra said.

"Not a horse?" Bill inquired anxiously.

"Oh, no. It's something I saw in a museum some place."

"Of course, we could turn 'em over to the Transport as pack mules. Or, failing that, we could borrow some more money and buy 'em a cab."

I could stand no more. "The mare is a perfect lady's hack," I maintained stiffly, "and the other is called The Gorgon."

"But I'm not a perfect lady," Sandra remarked. "I wouldn't know about old Gorgonzola."

"It's by Idiocy, out of Spite," Bill said. "Listen, brainstorm, you went to Bombay with fifteen hundred rupees to buy a horse. You've come back with two horses and—"

"And they cost two thousand rupees," I blurted. "You may as well know now as later."

"You've spent—they've cost—" Words failed Bill, which was fortunate. At last: "Here, take the silly horse. I'm through," he exploded.

"Hadn't we better give him a trial first?" Sandra asked soothingly. "Let's get a saddle on him and Scruffy can show us his paces around the race course."

"I tried him in Bombay," I objected. "The trouble with me is I don't look like a jockey . . ."

"Another trouble is that you don't ride like one." He turned to our native groom. "Here, syce, get a saddle on this horse."

BILL spoke thoughtfully. He had been examining The Gorgon while we talked and he seemed to be wondering whether, after all, there were possibilities.

The brute had a wall eye; the sloping, springy pasterns and oblique shoulders of

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a thoroughbred; and the quarters of a pack mule. But there was power in those quarters for all that.

Sandra, too, was beginning to relent. As the syce tried to get alongside The Gorgon with a saddle, she started to prophesy.

"I feel inspired. I see a vision of a crowded race track. They are coming down the straight. What horse is that in front? Can it be The Gorgon? Look, they're neck and neck. The Gorgon does it—yes—no— The Gorgon wins. Jeepers, look out!"

The Gorgon, his ears flat and his nostrils distended, had jerked the rein from Bill and was making straight for her with nerve-shattering bounds which seemed to shake the countryside. She beat him to the bicycle shed by a very short head. He pulled up with braced forelegs and stood for a moment regarding her fixedly. Then he lowered his ugly head and blew disconsolately in the dust.

"And," Sandra went on, as if nothing had happened, "I am now established as the greatest clairvoyant in the East. Look at him: he's bowing."

"Can he beg?" Bill asked. He walked quietly up to the horse and recovered the lunging rein. Then, with the aid of the syce, he managed to get a bridle over The Gorgon's head. And as the whites of the horse's eyes began to show again, he took a flying swing at the saddle and thrust his feet home in the irons just in time.

I didn't want to dwell on the next few minutes. It was all faintly embarrassing for me. After all, I'd bought the horse and Bill was—or had been up to then—my best friend.

Still, as an exhibition of horsemanship his performance couldn't be surpassed. The Gorgon achieved the perpendicular seven times. He indulged in as many savage, twisting bucks. He tried everything short of rolling. And Bill remained firmly in the saddle.

At last The Gorgon paused for inspiration and Sandra asked: "Can I uncover my ears now?"

"Sorry. By the way, I suppose you haven't noticed a couple of my teeth sculling around? No? Well, they must be lodged in The Gorgon's neck. You know, after he's had a shampoo and a haircut, this thing might make a horse after all."

Sandra came over to The Gorgon and said firmly: "I don't care what you-all say. This horse is going to be a gold mine. And I think he's a swell race horse—"

I was just in time to drag her from the striking hoofs and bared teeth of the swell race horse.

"Must have misunderstood me," Sandra murmured, as she collected the wreckage of her sun helmet from the syce. But this exhibition of temper had annoyed Bill and he turned The Gorgon towards the race course, which adjoined the station.

"Righto," he snapped. "If that's how you feel, let yourself go." And he brought his stick down smartly.

I glanced at my watch and timed him over the measured furlong. Then I turned to Sandra. "If that horse can move like that after being cooped up in a horse box," I said, "the Lord knows what he'll do after a few months training." And even Bill, when he brought the chastened Gorgon back to us, had revised his estimate.

"Scruffy," he said solemnly, as he rode up, "I formally withdraw everything I said about The Gorgon and even some of the things I said about you. This horse can travel. Why, if I'd used my spurs, we'd have been half way to Madras by now. Of course, there's still the matter of the mystery horse. . . . Where is that other plug-ugly you bought, by the way?"

BUT the mare was still with us. She was contentedly eating my riding gloves. It was about then that she was named Muriel, although nobody knew how it happened and everybody denied responsibility for so naming her. Maybe it was just because she looked like Muriel. These things happen.

In fact, by the time the three of us had re-assembled in the club veranda that eve-

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ning, Muriel was not only established as a name but the mare was established in the affections of Miss Sandra Playle to an extent that made Bill slightly disgusted. However, there were more important items on the agenda than Muriel.

"The point is," Bill remarked, "that although The Gorgon may win a fortune for us at some unspecified date, you've spent two thousand rupees on these two ponies. Allowing one thousand and ninety-nine rupees for this Gorgon thing, and one rupee or the other exhibit, that leaves us with the task of explaining to the bank that they've lent us five hundred rupees. Assuming they *have* lent us five hundred rupees, that is. We shan't know for certain till the check comes back."

"But look here; I've sent the bank a check for five hundred," I explained. And I added: "You've no vision. You should look at this thing in a big way."

"If the bank manager doesn't look at your check in a big way, we shall all have to walk to Bombay and swim home," Bill grumbled.

"Oh, the bank'll be all right. My aunt is guaranteeing that five hundred." (I discovered later that, fortunately, she was.) Bill relented slightly.

At last it was decided to enter The Gorgon for the Dilkusha Handicap at the next Chandar Serrai meeting and on that occasion to stake as much as his joint owners could manage to borrow, on a win.

Meanwhile, we would try him in three minor meetings upcountry to school him to racing and see if the final great venture would be worth the risk.

Sandra had been in favor of a more spectacular finale in the almost Ascot atmosphere of Calcutta or Bombay. But this was vetoed on the grounds of unwise publicity. Chandar Serrai was well enough known to give us plenty of scope for our bets, but not so well known that we were likely to meet anything too startling in the way of opposition.

"Unless old Aginacastro enters anything for it," Bill added grimly.

"If he does, we're sunk," I said. Mr. Aginacastro's name cast a shadow over the meeting. He'd never been known to win by fair means and he'd seldom been known to lose.

Bill shrugged. "We'll just have to take a chance with him," he said.

"And," said Sandra enthusiastically, "we can add Muriel to our string and have two chances." But this suggestion roused such an overwhelming lack of enthusiasm that even Sandra paused.

THE meeting broke up in disorder, a situation which was maintained throughout The Gorgon's training. Yet this was more the fault of the trainee than of the trainers. For nothing could cure The Gorgon's temper; and after weeks of fighting, Bill's was almost as evil as The Gorgon's.

But we persisted and eventually our efforts were rewarded. The Gorgon won his first race.

To our surprised delight, Bill managed to keep him free of serious accident to himself and the other entries and—even more difficult—to hold him within a reasonable distance of the rest of the field at the finish.

And it was the same in the second and again in the third minor meeting. Although The Gorgon was building up an unenviable reputation from the paddock to the starter, nothing could touch him once the flag fell. Luck seemed to be with us: for Sandra, playing the break, entered Muriel for a five-furlong scurry and scored a solitary and unexpected win over a diminutive field.

We began to fear the news of The Gorgon's successes would spread, but we comforted ourselves with the thought that there were bound to be some pretty hot entries for the Dilkusha Handicap and therefore we might get away lightly with the handicapping.

"We've more or less schooled The Gorgon to racing and she's almost cured of crowd fright. All we've got to do now is to

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raise the wind in all directions till we've got enough to make this win at Chander Serrai worth while," Bill said.

"And after that," I agreed, "it's England, Home and Beauty, with no debts, no overdraft and a clean slate."

"Of course," said Sandra thoughtfully, "we've got to win that race. . . . I mean, I'm only thinking of Mr. Aginacastro. I hear he's entered his horse Bijli."

There was a significant pause. Bijli was bad news. But we refused to be depressed. And we were just re-affirming our determination to win when Mr. Ram Das, the Indian private secretary to that scourge of the race course, Mr. Aginacastro, strolled over from the grandstand and joined us.

Undismayed by the silence which greeted his arrival, he opened the conversation quite cheerfully.

"My master, the great Aginacastro, has sent me to you," he began. And he beamed ingratiatingly through his goldrimmed glasses. "He is, as doubtless you know, the Napoleon of the racing fraternity hereabouts," he added.

"Then go and tell him," Bill said gently, "that I am the Wellington of that fraternity."

"But, sir, I do not understand," smiled Ram Das. "He is telling me that you have all put your shirtings on this horse called The Gorgon."

"Not all," Sandra murmured demurely. Ram Das continued: "Verree well. Now Mr. Aginacastro has entered the impregnable horse Bijli to win the Dilkusha Handicap." He stressed the word "win" and Bill and I exchanged glances.

"Undoubtedly he will win," Ram Das continued. "But, sirs and lady, because my master does not wish you to suffer from the pocket, he has sent me to offer to hedge with you on all bets made." Still misguidedly smiling, he paused.

"You mean," Bill said, "he's trying to buy us off?"

"Oh, sir, why do you talk this foolishness to me? The verree idea is inconceivable. Let us be pals and discuss matter gladly. I am man of honor."

"You're a what?" Bill demanded. This annoyed Ram Das.

"If I am a what, then you are a horse," he retorted with considerable heat. "And remember the slips between the cups and the lips."

"We're not even interested in those," Bill assured him. "You can go and tell your master that we're like the Ten Commandments you can break us but you can't get rid of us. And this time, he isn't going to break us. Good morning."

He had a long look at Ram Das, seeming to weigh the loss of his commission against the pleasure of employing his thirty-eight-inch cutting whip. Ram Das didn't even wait to say good morning. As he departed, Bill said: "And now we can look out for trouble."

He was very right about that.

AS A matter of fact, the confirmation of how right Bill's guess had been arrived at a singularly inopportune moment, as is the way with bad news.

I had managed to get Sandra to ride out to the old Shalimar garden with me and there, beneath the drooping, heavily perfumed branches of a mochra tree, I was trying to summon up courage to tell her how much I loved her.

And she, judging from the look in her eye, was marshling her technique to sidestep my protestations of affection. The moment was pregnant with emotion, at any rate from my angle, when old Hira Singh, my syce, thrust his head through the blossoms and emitted a piercing: "P-s-s-s-t", which made us leap apart as if we'd been caught in a fond embrace. I shouldn't have minded so much if we had.

I'd only got as far as the immoral tendencies of Hira's maiden aunt by marriage (luckily Sandra didn't understand the vernacular) when he interrupted me by saying: "Sahib, I have news."

I told him a few other things he had as well; but he went on calmly: "It is said in the bazaar that Aginacastro Sahib is entering two horses for the Dilkusha Handicap. Bijli to win, and Shaitan to

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make sure that our Gorgon doesn't win." He salaamed and withdrew his head.

At any rate, he'd achieved his effect, for the news silenced me. Although I prided myself on never having indulged in foul riding in my life, there was very little I didn't know about it after eight years of experience racing in India.

Sandra must have read this latest disaster from my face. But for a while she said nothing. She was that kind of girl. It wasn't till we'd mounted and headed the ponies for home that she finally broke the silence.

"What exactly does it mean?" she asked.

I explained the simple system. One horse is entered to win. The second solely to mark down the favorite. The second entry does nothing else but prevent the favorite from interfering with the first entry's win. It's a dirty game but not unknown on the turf.

Sandra thought it over. After a pause, she said: "Come on; I'll race you to the *nullah*." She didn't wait for an answer but turned her pony—the revolting Muriel—toward the dry river bed about six furlongs distant.

Muriel, a beast of simple tastes and few amusements, apparently realized the situation had diverting possibilities. She had a distorted sense of humour.

I was riding Weazleface, and Sandra won by a couple of lengths. She seemed pleased till she turned in the saddle and saw the tell tale ridges of sweat and lather on Weazleface's neck, crying aloud that I'd been trying to lose that match. Then her expression changed.

"I didn't think you'd act that way," she said accusingly. I might have known the red spots in her cheeks were equivalent to the red burgee flown by ships when they carry gun powder. Like a fool, I tried to make light of the thing.

"Muriel would have won fairly if the race had been a couple of furlongs longer," I said. Then I added: "Won or burst. She's built more for comfort than speed."

"She'd have won fairly anyway," Sandra retorted, "only she's a bit off color today."

"Indigestion?" I asked.

"No. Boredom," said Sandra. "She's caught it from me."

I WAS still trying to blunder out of the argument when Sandra's deplorable pony suddenly looked round at me. I found myself regarding the beatific smile on her fatuous face with a feeling of horror. I shuddered. But Muriel took in the situation at a glance. She was good at taking things in, having, we'd discovered, taken in three previous owners before I bought her.

She seemed to say: "You poor fool; race again and win fairly. It's your only chance." I took her advice and said: "Look here, Sandra, I'll race you to the club gates: it's about seven furlongs. And you'll see how well Muriel goes the distance."

But this time I won by about eight lengths. The fool Muriel had been pulling my leg. However, when Sandra reined up beside me, she had quite forgotten her annoyance.

"It's temperament," she explained. "When you drew ahead about half way, I got my whip and hit Muriel. And she promptly closed up like a clam and dropped into a defiant trot. But I'm glad you didn't let me win his time, Scruffy. I could never forgive a man who pulled a horse or gave a race away. You wouldn't do that, would you?"

"Don't be silly, Sandra. If you mean would I ever, in a real race, indulge in pulling, or boring, or crossing, or even the gentle art of tipping a man's foot out of the stirrup with my spur, then I can assure you he answer is a very emphatic no."

"I reckon I knew that really," Sandra admitted. Then she asked innocently—just a shade too innocently: "How about this trick of Aginacastro's? D'you it would be quite straight to try to beat him at his own game?"

"I don't see why not," I said. "How exactly do you mean?" But she wouldn't say

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anything further. In fact, it wasn't till just before the Dilkusha Handicap that she actually explained her plan.

Bill had been, of course, worried by the news of Aginacastro's move. He scowled as heavily as his eyeglass would permit; pointed out there was nothing we could do about it before the race, for to complain to the stewards on the strength of a bazaar rumor would be futile; and hoped he'd be able to get The Gorgon right out in front from the start. This was a very faint hope, for The Gorgon was a proverbially bad starter.

We were both, therefore, in a state of nervous tension as the date of the meeting drew near. Only Sandra was anywhere near normal and we thought that as because she failed to appreciate the situation. Both Bill and I had borrowed every penny we could lay our hands on and piled the lot on The Gorgon to win. If The Gorgon lost, we were well and truly busted.

Sandra said: "We'll win all right. Our honor's at stake."

"It isn't honor that worries me," I told her; it's the stake." And it was then she started to explain her plan.

"You remember I said I hated crooked riding? Pulling a horse, for example, seems pretty mean to me." She glanced at me and went on: "But this Aginacastro racke is something different; something so lousy that anything goes to combat it. So . . ."

She paused. It was one of the very times I ever saw her even faintly embarrassed. "So . . . I've entered Muriel—"

She got no farther.

Bill and I chorused: "Muriel?" Then Bill added kindly: "It's the sun. I knew it. It gets newcomers that way."

Sandra ignored him.

Can't you see that if we enter a horse to ride off Aginacastro's spare entry, then The Gorgon can get through unhindered? I don't see anything wrong in that," she maintained.

"There's nothing wrong in that," Bill agreed, "except Muriel."

"But it's only for the first two or three furlongs. After that, The Gorgon will have drawn away and can fight it out with Bijli. Muriel will just be a buffer."

"But a lot depends on the draw," I objected. "Muriel may not get drawn between The Gorgon and the bloke put on to ride The Gorgon off."

"That," said Sandra sweetly, "will largely depend on your clever riding, Scruffy."

"What?" I yelled. "Me? D'you mean I'm to be slaughtered to make The Gorgon's holiday?"

But by now Bill had become rather taken with the scheme and the result of the argument was therefore a foregone conclusion. Eventually, I went off disgustedly to pack my racing kit.

It didn't appear difficult, even if I was drawn on the outside, to get enough pace out of Muriel at the start of the race to be able to insinuate the idiot mare between Bill and Aginacastro's second entry. Of course, there was the risk of The Gorgon's wicked heels, but nobody seemed to care must about that, except me.

So the nauseous Muriel was duly entrained for Chandar Serrai with her stable companion, The Gorgon.

WELL, we'd cheered up a bit by the end of the first day. Bill had ridden a winner for a friend and I had managed to scrape a place in a five-furlong scurry with Weazleface. Sandra was jubilant. She said everything was looking fine and dandy. But when the morrow dawned, Bill and I felt anything but fine and considerably less than dandy. And by the time the bell went for the big race, we were both in a mood of profound depression.

The news had got round somehow and half the bookies in Asia seemed to have congregated at Chandar Serrai. But Aginacastro's second entry had given them a very straight tip and The Gorgon stood at very long odds against, while Bijli was a red-hot favorite. Aginacastro's second string, Shaitan, was practically out of the betting and Muriel was actually so.

The confidence of the bookies didn't disturb Sandra. She was only delighted to

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learn we could get our money on The Gorgon at a shade under thirty to one. Since between us we'd managed to borrow about five thousand rupees, we stood to win a pocket if we won. *If* we won.

When we went to weigh in, we found there's been some muddle over Muriel's entry and no provision had been made for her. However, we were able to produce the acceptance form and at last a tattered weight cloth was handed to me. I objected but was told it was the only one left. Muriel was going to behave like a clown anyway, so it didn't much matter how she looked for her performance; it was all part of the depressing sequence. I climbed onto the scales.

"Eight pounds," said the clerk of the scales, and with the weighted cloth on my arm I wandered out to the paddock. Allowing for the loss of Muriel's maiden allowance, I'd got off lightly. Even The Gorgun wasn't overweighted, in spite of his three wins.

I stood for a while, eyeing Muriel coldly while she was led round the saddling ring. And she, at the zenith of her racing glory, saw fit to turn around and deliberately yawn in my face. Just then the saddling bell went.

To my jaundiced eye, the diminutive racing saddle seemed to lie almost flat on Muriel's back as Hira Singh swung me up onto it. The protesting grunt with which Muriel greeted my arrival annoyed me still more. I looked over my shoulder and saw The Gorgon had gone fighting mad and had cleared a wide space for himself in which he and Bill revolved, locked in a fond embrace.

One thing was good; from the point of view of Muriel's *raison d'être* in the race, the draw couldn't have been better. The Gorgon on the rails, then Muriel, and then Shaitan. Away to the left, about eight places, lay Bijli, the favourite.

Of course, from my point of view it wasn't so good. I was between a horse whose sole object would be to get through or over me and another which would probably kick me into eternity.

Unperturbed, apparently, by this happy prospect, Muriel ambled onto the track and goodnaturedly broke into a ponderous canter. I pulled her back into a walk. She seemed relieved about that. Then Bill on The Gorgon came alongside and we turned towards the starting gate together.

I noticed the Gorgon's neck was already white with lather where he'd been fighting for his head. Bill said grimly: "He's up to his old tricks. We're in for an earthquake at the start."

He sat down to a couple of vicious bucks and added: "Look here, old son; you'd better forget Sandra's brainstorm and just keep that cab horse out of the way."

"If it's a choice of falling foul of The Gorgon or Sandra, I'd sooner risk The Gorgon," I said.

"Well, I wish your sickening brute would stop smirking at me. It makes me feel quite uncomfortable."

We'd reached the starting gate and Bill tried to wrench The Gorgon's head round towards it. "And here we are," he said, jamming his mount between Muriel and the rails. "We shall know the worst in a very few minutes now. So long, Scruffy; I'll see you later."

"I hope so," I said sadly. Then the gate went up and we were off.

THE Gorgon, on my right, jumped away perfectly. On my left, I could see the dark face of Shaitan's jockey registering determination to get ahead of me and cross over to The Gorgon. Between my knees Muriel, entering joyously into the spirit of the thing, galloped with cheerful abandon.

Rather to my surprise, we held it like that for a couple of furlongs. Then both The Gorgon and Shaitan started to draw ahead of me. I saw the knee of Shaitan's jockey creep up to Muriel's head. He was already glancing to his right, measuring the distance before edging over toward Bill. I touched Muriel with the spur.

I wondered what effect this would have on the uncanny brute. At first she checked. Then her ears plainly signaled:

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"I'll show you." And she hurled herself forward like a whippet tank.

Shaitan's jockey, seeing Muriel drop back suddenly when she checked, selected that moment to start crossing over. Muriel, going with the deadly velocity of a motor bus at an amber light, took Shaitan just behind the off shoulder and brushed him carelessly aside. Burning under the unprovoked insult which still stung her a hand's breadth being the girth, she ignored the remarks addressed to her by Shaitan's jockey and the incredulous congratulations which I tendered.

And then, suddenly recognizing her old playmate The Gorgon on her right, she regained her usual cheerful temper. So obvious was the change that I half expected her to turn round and smile forgivingly at me.

There comes a day in the lives of all animate, and some inanimate things, when it is impossible to go wrong. It comes at times to golf clubs and fishing rods. It came to Muriel.

With the race more than half over and Shaitan fully accounted for, Muriel had performed her allotted task beyond our wildest expectations. Her job was done. But she decided she could do even better.

Happily conscious of the fact that she had latent talents as a race horse in addition to her acknowledged personal charm, she settled down to devote her preposterous mind to winning that race. This was Muriel's day.

With only two furlongs to go, I saw, to my horrified amazement, that The Gorgon was slowly dropping back. I glanced over my right shoulder and found there were only the two of us in it, although Bijli was creeping up. And beneath me, the feet of that misguided fool Muriel were hammering out:

"You're winning . . . winning . . . isn't that nice? You're winning . . ."

Far more money than we possessed staked on The Gorgon. Muriel, the adored of Sandra, beneath me. And all I had to do to make her close up like a clam was to apply my whip. But against that, quite apart from my own sense of honor, were Sandra's words: "I could never forgive a man who pulled a horse or gave a race away."

Well, I hoped she was looking through her glasses from the grandstand and enjoying the mess her Muriel had made of everything.

Half a furlong to go. Practically on top of the post. I looked back despairingly at Bill. But it was hopeless.

TO A faintly startled chorus of applause, Muriel flashed past the post half a length ahead of The Gorgon. Five lengths separated The Gorgon from Bijli. The rest were nowhere. Muriel, now fully roused, was all in favor of going round again. She exuded pride. She had done it. Literally.

A very pale Sandra came out to lead her in. "Darling," she whispered, "what happened?"

"Better ask Muriel," I suggested.

"I—I—don't know what to say," she began.

"If you're at a loss for words, you can ask Bill for a few. He's using plenty."

But Sandra went on: "Still, I'm mighty glad you rode to win."

I was still thinking this one over (somehow it made that nightmare race more bearable) when Bill rode up and started to off saddle. I thought he was on the verge of apoplexy. He said, in a strangled voice: "A truly remarkable performance." Then he looked hard at Muriel and added: "I wish I had a humane killer."

"Why humane?" I asked.

With our saddles on our arms, we passed into the weighing room. I climbed onto the scales. Dismally I reflected that Muriel must have benefited by her exercise during The Gorgon's training and Bill and I had been too prejudiced to notice it.

I wasn't taking much interest when the clerk of the scales said: "Five . . . seven . . nine . . . hello, Scruffy; what's wrong? You've lost four pounds since you weighed in."

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"More like a thousand . . ." I began. "The stitching of that damned saddle cloth must have parted. It's fallen out on the course."

"Well, I can't check you out," he said and he looked inquiringly at Bill.

Only then did the full beauty of the position burst on me. "So The Gorgon wins on an objection?" I asked. The clerk nodded sympathetically. I leaped to my feet.

"Here, where are you off to?" he demanded.

"I'm going to find that weight," I said. "I want to have it stuffed . . . framed, I mean."

The clerk gaped at me.

Bill gripped my shoulder. "England, Home and Beauty." He grinned.

I started to repeat his words. "England, Home and—to Hades with that weight. Where's Sandra?"

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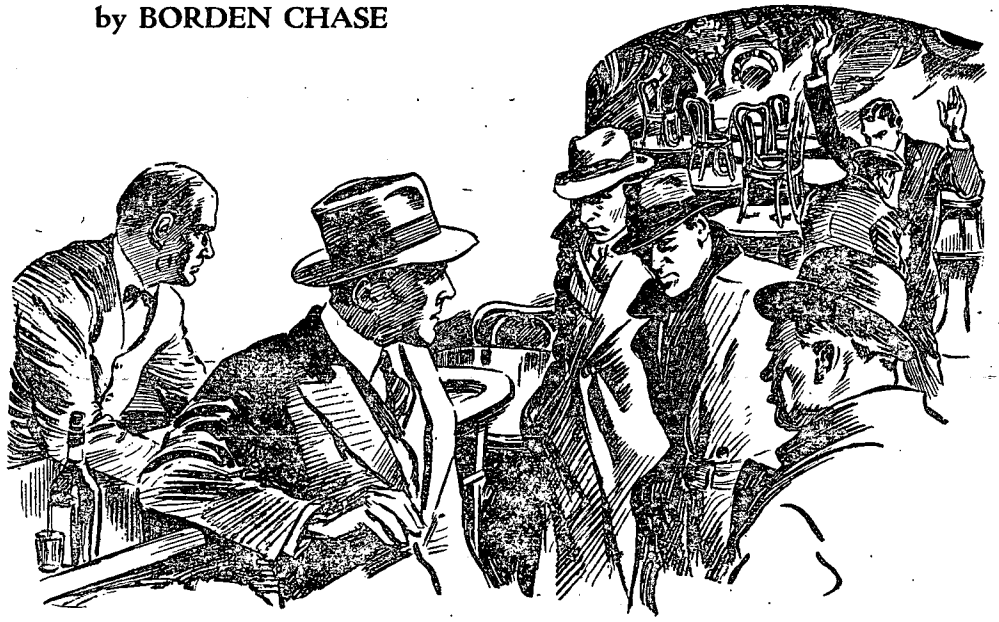
by BORDEN CHASE



Smooth tensed as the armed men got in a closer circle

IN his search for the mysterious Center, head man in a fantastically widespread espionage network functioning in America, SMOOTH KYLE meets a lot of interesting—and deadly—people. After twenty-four hours on the case, he is convinced that PROFESSOR STRICKLAND, the scholarly coordinator of the three Government Departments that are involved in the spy-hunt, had not exaggerated in telling Smooth that this was his toughest assignment.

Even with the help of shrewd blonde GILDA GARLAND who adores him, Smooth finds he has hands full. Receiving a tip that JACQUES BOVILLE's Club Yvonne is one of the network's many headquarters, Smooth and Gilda pay the place a visit. Within a few hours they have unearthed a likely looking group of suspects. MARIE ROUBARD, the Alsatian orchestra-leader. FREDERICK the headwaiter. Boville himself, possibly. And lovely NADJA SHERENE, latest Hollywood importation.

Smooth, in spite of Gilda's acid disapproval, decides to tackle Nadja first. Nadja admits she is working for Center, and begs Smooth to help her. As proof of her good faith, she reveals that Frederick and Marie Roubard are agents of Center, but that she knows very little of their work. She shows Smooth how Center communicates with his agents by means of messages pricked out in Braille. And she tells him that at first she had been assigned to the job of getting rid of him, Smooth, but that her orders have been changed. She is now to concentrate her dazzling allures on young LIEUTENANT HODKINS, on whose plane a new and deadly bomb-sight is to be tested. Center plans to wreck the plane, seize the bomb-sight and ship it to his homeland aboard a freighter. That checks with what Smooth has learned from an ex-gambler friend, MARK HESSON, namely that he has been blackmailed into agreeing to hold up the sailing of the *Malay Princess,* until he receives instructions from one THOMAS GRAYSON.

NADJA insists that she is working for Center only because her brother lies in an Austrian concentration camp in the shadow of the headman's axe. Smooth is inclined to believe Nadja's story, and agrees to let her go ahead, report to Center the

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time of the bomb-sight test flight, if she will warn him in time to go into acton.

Gilda scoffingly points out that Nadja had told him nothing he did not already know. But DAVE HALEY, the Broadway columnist, who has plugged Nadja into Hollywood success, confirms Nadja's story about her brother's danger. Smooth even convinces his coworkers from the Secret Service and the Justice Department to play it his way and promises that Center will never get the bomb-sight beyond the twelve-mile limit.

Meantime, Gilda has not been entirely idle. She has enlisted the aid of RAGS DONOVAN, gangster and ex-rum runner and hi-jacker, and of two just-inside-the-law characters, WALTER KUNZ and BRET DANIEL. When Kunz and Daniel try to take Frederick to a quiet place for questioning, a riot breaks out outside. Smooth smells a phony and mixes into the scrap. Uselessly. When it is over, Frederick and the two other men are stretched out on the pavement.

Smooth weaves to his feet. Suddenly Gilda calls out: "Smooth! Behind you!" Smooth ducks too late. Lights explode in his brain and the asphalt comes up to smack him in the face. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

SEVERAL BLIND MICE

THE lips were familiar and so was the nose. For that matter, Smooth recognized one of the eyes. The other was puffed and beneath it was a blue crescent. He tried to lift his head, and the room spun. He looked at the lips again and noticed they were smiling.

"How was the dream?" asked Gilda quietly.

"Not so good," said Smooth dully. "I got stuck with a B picture and no newsreel." He closed his eyes again and waited for the room to stop spinning. "Where am I, and why?"

"You're in Jacques Boville's office at the Club Yvonne," said Gilda. "You've got a lump on your head and your suit needs pressing."

"Who hit me?"

"Officer Cassidy of the Emergency Squad. He weighs two hundred and twenty pounds, stands six-foot-two and used to be heavyweight champion of the Pacific Fleet. Would you like to try another waltz with him, handsome?"

Smooth opened one eye and looked at Gilda. "Who pinned that shiner on you?"

"The same Cassidy—but you ought to see his nose."

"You're no lady."

"That's what he said."

Smooth sat up and put both hands on the red leather couch to steady himself. He opened the other eye and blinked at Gilda. He could recall talking to Walter Kunz, and with an effort he could remember hearing Gilda's voice calling to him. Evidently Officer Cassidy had executed a flank movement, seen Smooth bending over Frederick and uncorked a right. Smooth didn't blame him. It was easier to hit the wrong man and apologize than to ask questions during a street fight.

"What about Walter Kunz and Bret Daniel?" he asked.

"Both of them in the hospital for the next few weeks. So is Frederick, but he'll be there longer—or else."

Smooth glanced about the office. Jacques had taken over the upper section of the building and evidently was using the top floor as his apartment. This room fronted on the street and was nicely equipped with modern furniture. There were a few good paintings on the walls. Smooth focused his eyes on one and watched it sway as though it were on a pendulum.

Gilda handed him a tall cool glass. "Drink this and sit still. While you're coming out of your dream, I'll put you up to date." She lit a cigarette and handed it to him. "Bret Daniel worked an oldy on Frederick—he left with Kunz and came back in a few minutes, claimed he'd lost a bunch of keys

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and asked Frederick to help him find them. They looked under the table and in the check room, then Bret said he might have dropped them as he left the club. Frederick went with him to the street to ask Riley about the keys, and Bret eased a gun against his back. Frederick knows how to take a hint. He walked right into the cab where Kunz was waiting."

Gilda spread her hands.

"I remember the rest," said Smooth. "But none of it makes sense. Unless I'm still dizzy, the mob that started the riot was a crowd of Groupmen. You could almost see the swastikas on their arms. Still, I heard one of them ordering his pals to kill Frederick."

"I heard that, too," said Gilda. "And it looks as though they may have succeeded."

"But why?" said Smooth. "We know Frederick takes orders from Center. So does the Group. If we look up Frederick's pedigree we'll probably find he's no more English than I am—educated there, perhaps. His accent is perfect. But it's a cinch he isn't working for anyone but Center."

He shrugged.

"I'm not worrying about Frederick," said Gilda. She had been sitting in an easy chair near the desk, but now she stood and paced slowly across the room. "I'm trying to figure how Center always manages to be one jump ahead of us. Rags Donovan doesn't talk out of turn. When he told Daniel and Kunz about Frederick, you can bet he was right. You can also bet Daniel and Kunz didn't repeat it until they told us at the table. But within a half hour, Center had rounded up a mob of Groupmen and sent them after Frederick. Who tipped him—and how?"

"How far is up?" laughed Smooth. "I'll listen—you give me the answers."

GILDA sat beside him on the couch. She put a finger to her puffed eye and winced. "Dave Haley was at the table but he's in the clear. I'm sure he wouldn't talk out of turn. Besides, he didn't leave the club."

"Maybe he's one of Center's pals."

"Grow up!" said Gilda impatiently. "Dave Haley is the original Yankee Doodle boy from Manhattan—he's been after the Group for years. He spends most of his time trying to get something on them so he can break it in print."

"That might be a blind, gorgeous."

"Then why did he make that broadcast last night?" she asked sharply. "Someone saw Mark Hesson talking to you and sent word to Center. He decided to keep Mark's mouth shut and passed the word to Frederick. Then Frederick hired Carmetta and the mob to grab Hesson. Now you're trying to tell me Dave Haley crossed Center when he helped to get Hesson clear. Is that it?"

"Too many words," said Smooth wearily. "Me—I don't know anything about anyone and when I try to guess, my head hurts. Help me to get on my feet, point me at the door and start me rolling. I've got a thousand things to do and you sit here asking riddles!"

"Oh, stay put," said Gilda. She rested a hand on his shoulder and pushed him back against the cushions. "You weren't in such a hurry to leave Nadja. What's wrong—do I bore you?"

"Lady, you're wonderful! I'm crazy about you! Even with a black eye, I think you're the tops. Now, will you *please* leave me alone!"

"My hero!" said Gilda disgustedly. "He's going to have the world with his smart little brain, but he can't even duck a right hook in a street fight!"

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She stood and walked quickly across the room, opened the door and paused at the stair.

"Bounce right along, wonderful! And while you're bouncing try to figure this one—Mark Hesson spoke to me while you were taking your nap. He says Gray sent some new instructions. He was ordered to charter one of the Marondale Towing Company's sea-going tugs and hold it at the pier in Furman Street, ready to leave at a moment's notice."

"Then what?"

"Then—nothing."

"Make sense!" cried Smooth. "What other orders did he get? What about the *Malay Princess?* When does she leave? Where does the tug fit—what does—?"

"It's your turn to guess, angel," said Gilda. "Why not ask Nadja? Or Marie Roubard? Or better still, bounce up to a Gypsy Tea Room and let the fortune teller find the answer in a teacup! Don't ask me—I've got work to do!"

Smooth heard her heels tapping down the stair. He stood and took a step toward the door. The walls danced and he grabbed the table.

"Wait a minute!" he called.

There was no answer and Smooth rubbed the back of his head. Sea-going tugs? Marondale Towing Company and the dock in Furman Street? The thing was turning into a nightmare. Smooth tried to remember the outfit but couldn't place the firm name. He knew Furman Street—knew it well. It was one of the oldest streets in Brooklyn at the foot of Columbia Heights—a narrow road lined with warehouses on one side and ancient stone buildings on the other. A few steamship companies docked their freighters there and the piers were usually busy.

It had once been a hard neighborhood and Bill Lovett's mob had ruled it completely. That was in the dry days when rum boats had often slipped into the East River to unload their cargo at one of the rickety old wooden piers in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. Further up the river was the Navy Yard, and a few miles below were the anchorage sites in the Upper Bay where the *Malay Princess* and other freighters waited to make their zig-zag trips across the ocean.

THINKING of this, Smooth recalled his promise to Buckley and Whitman. He had guaranteed that Center would not leave the *Malay Princess* once he boarded it. That had to be taken care of immediately. He walked to the desk near the windows and reached for the phone. Like the one in the hall, this was probably tapped, but it made little difference. Smooth dialed a number and waited.

"Midcity Garage—Freedman talking," said a voice when the connection was made.

"Hello, Abe" said Smooth. "This is Kyle—up to my neck in work or I'd have been in to see you. How many cabs are you operating?"

"Fifty, and they're all relics. Why? You lookin' for work?"

"No. I'm looking for Rags Donovan."

"Better you than me, pal!" said Freedman. "That guy is poison!"

"So I hear," said Smooth. "Pass the word to some of the drivers. Ask them to spread it along Broadway. I'll be at the Club Yvonne."

"Glad to oblige," said the garage owner.

Smooth hung up and walked to the door. His head was clearer now but he held tighly to the rail as he went down the stairs. Jacques was near the

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check room and he hurried forward to meet Smooth.

"Ah, Monsieur Kyle—I am so sorry!" he said quickly. " 'Ow is your head? It ees all right now? Yes?"

"It's terrible," said Smooth. "Where's Gilda?"

"She 'as left, and she did not say where."

"That's a help."

"There ees something I can do?"

"Yeah. Tell Riley to pass the word I want to see Rags Donovan."

"At my club?" cried Boville. He lifted both hands in horror. "Rags Donovan at *my* club?" He looked hurriedly about, caught Smooth by the arm and walked him to a small passageway that led into a rear yard.

When they were alone, he lost the bewildered Latin expression he used with his guests. Lost his accent, too. "Give me a break, Smooth!" he said quickly. "Don't bring that mug into my place. I've been on the up an' up ever since Repeal. The Club Yvonne is making money. But if you clutter up the joint with guys like Rags—I'm sunk."

SMOOTH laughed. "I like you better with the accent, Jacques," he said. "Don't worry about Rags. He won't come. He'll send someone else to get the message. Settle down and take care of your customers."

"Settle down?" said Boville. He lifted his eyes toward the night sky and sighed. "Two days ago I was sittin' pretty. Then you blow into town and turn my place into a merry-go-round. First it was Hesson, then Frederick, and now a free-for-all in the street—what comes next, feller?"

"Why not ask Center?"

"Who t'hell is he?"

"Your boss—I think."

Boville shook his head. "You got me wrong, Smooth. Plenty wrong. I'm not working for any guy called Center. The Club Yvonne belongs to me."

"And I suppose Marie Roubard blew in on a cloud," laughed Smooth. "You don't know the girl. Never saw her until she asked for a job. That it?"

"Why? What's wrong with Marie?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Then why shouldn't she work here? Personally, I think she's a swell kid, and I know she likes you. She's been worried ever since they brought you in with a lump on your skull. Each time I go past the orchestra she asks if you're all right."

"Glad to hear it," said Smooth. He started toward the hall. "Give Riley my message and tell him to send it along."

Again Boville protested. Smooth didn't answer. He made his way past a group of people near the check room and walked toward the corner table where Mark Hesson sat, staring into his drink. The theaters had emptied their crowds and the club was filling to capacity. Most of the guests were in evening clothes—laughing, chattering groups who called back and forth to one another across the room. Smooth glanced toward the bar in search of Dave Haley. He wasn't there, nor at any of the tables.

Mark waved a careless hand when he saw Smooth. " 'Lo, feller," he said. "How's your head?"

"Not bad," said Smooth. He sat facing Hesson. "Gilda gave me the setup on the new orders. What do you make of them?"

"I've stopped guessing," said Hesson wearily. "When Gray called, I phoned the Marondale Company and did as he instructed."

"But didn't they question the or-

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der? Is it customary to charter a tug without giving the reason?"

"Oh, that often happens," said Hesson. "We've done quite a lot of business with the Marondale outfit. A good firm—been in business for more than fifty years. They probably figured one of our freighters had been shelled or torpedoed at sea and we were waiting for her position so we could send the tug. That happens sometimes when a ship isn't too badly damaged to get into port."

"You're sure the Marondale Company is on the level?"

"Good as gold. Captain Marondale was a Naval Reserve officer in the last war. Decorated for bravery."

Smooth cupped his chin on his hands and stared at the table cloth. He tried to think but the ideas wouldn't jell. Each hour added another piece to the puzzle and none of them seemed to fit.

Right now it looked as though McNeary had made a mistake. So had Buckley and Whitman. They should never had recommended Smooth to Professor Strickland. Not for this job. Charlie Chan would have been a better bet. Or Nero Wolfe, or Mr. Moto—one of those birds who could find a blond hair in the inkwell, put it under a microscope and then tell who killed Cock Robin. Smooth wasn't a detective. Had never claimed to be one. And now he was in trouble.

"Do you remember Rags Donovan?" he asked Hesson.

"Too well," said Mark.

"I understand he's still doing a little hijacking. Some of the boys are bringing in Scotch and brandy without paying duty. Rags grabs the loads whenever he can, and he's got a few fast boats operating out of Sheepshead Bay."

"What of it?"

"I've sent for Rags. One of his men ought to be here during the next few hours. If anything takes me away, I want you to give him a message."

"Glad to."

"Tell him where the *Malay Princess* is anchored and ask him to keep one of his boats close to her until she reaches the Ambrose Lightship. If anyone tries to get off, Rags is to grab the guy and hold him for me."

"Do you think he'll do it?"

"I know he will."

MARK nodded and ordered another drink from a passing waiter. The orchestra had started one of the popular numbers and Smooth turned to watch Marie conduct. She saw him and smiled. Her lips moved in a quiet question as she asked if he was all right. Smooth grinned and motioned toward an empty chair at the table. Marie winked in agreement and indicated she would join him after the number.

"Better be careful of that dame," said Hesson quietly. "I've had plenty of time to watch her during the past few nights and there's something about her that isn't right."

"Like what?"

"Oh, her music, for one thing. She swings a mean bow over that fiddle but sometimes she goes sour. I'm only an amateur musician but I know discords when I hear them. And I'm wondering why she does it."

"Stop wondering," laughed Smooth. "Marie is working for the same guy that gives orders to Thomas Gray. So was Frederick until he went to the hospital."

"And you're out to get him?"

"That's the general idea."

Mark Hesson spun his glass between his hands. He looked at the petite girl on the orchestra stand and then looked

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away. A waiter came to the table with a fresh drink. He turned to Smooth as he set the glasses on the table.

"A message for you, Mr. Kyle," he said quietly, and put down a sealed envelope. "It was delivered just a moment ago."

Smooth opened the flap and looked at the engraved name at the top of the paper. Nadja Sherene. The writing was in typical European script, neat but rather ornate. The message read:

Smooth, dear,

My fiancé thinks he will be able to stay in town until tomorrow evening. Possibly longer. Both of us are more than pleased with this good fortune. We hope you will be able to join us at luncheon tomorrow at my home. If this is convenient, please phone me in the morning.—

Nadja.

Smooth folded the note and put it in his pocket. The envelope was still on the table. Mark Hesson reached forward casually and picked it up. The ex-gambler looked at the flap and one of those blank smiles hovered about his eyes. He ran a finger along the sealed edge.

"Clumsy work," he said. "I'm afraid Jacques Boville has been reading your mail."

"How can you tell?"

"The flap is curling. That means he used too much steam. I used to be more careful when I opened the seals on a deck of cards to mark them, but Jacques was probably in a hurry."

"Thanks," said Smooth. He put the envelope in his pocket.

Nadja might be getting careless. Obviously, she had tried to get past the tapped phone by sending this note, but she should have known it wouldn't get through to Smooth until someone had read it. True, she had worded it carefully.

An invitation to lunch would mean little under most circumstances. It was common knowledge that she had come to the club with him earlier in the night. And when the message was relayed along to Center, he might think it was simply a clever trick of Nadja's—a smart way to pass the information along to him that Lieutenant Hodkins' flight had been postponed.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEATH, TO MUSIC

SMOOTH grinned. Not bad—not bad at all. Nadja was still one step ahead of Center and his mob. So was Smooth. Or at least he was running even with them. And this postponement had given him an extra day. One in which he might learn something from Marie Roubard.

She was coming toward the table now, and again Smooth paid Center a silent compliment on the type of agents he had picked. Marie's face was a gamine's—pert and provocative when she smiled, wistful when she didn't. A dozen people spoke to her as she passed. Some asked her to join them. Marie wrinkled the tip of her nose and shook her head, making the tight black curls dance as she did so.

"I 'ave worry about you," she said accusingly when she seated herself opposite Smooth. "Why do you get in thee fight? You want to get hurt—yes?"

Smooth laughed and introduced Mark Hesson. For a time Marie kept them amused with a running fire of questions about the street fight. She had watched it from the doorway and she had seen Gilda tangled with Officer Cassidy of the Emergency Squad.

"Such a woman!" she said. "*Ma foi, c'est bien fait!* It serves you right to

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get hurt. If you walk weeth a tiger, you weel get clawed!"

"C'est la pelle qui se moque du fourgon," said Smooth quietly.

Mark said, "Come again."

Marie tossed her head and laughed. She turned to Mark. "He says it ees the pot that calls thee kettle black, *monsieur*. I think he 'as learn that in school —no?"

"Probably," said Mark. He was watching Marie closely. Studying her with eyes that held no expression whatever.

She turned to Smooth. "You think I am dangerous? Why do you say that?"

Smooth grinned.

"Oh, just trying to show off my French. I haven't had much practice lately and I wondered if it was still understandable."

"Very understandable," said Marie. "I think I know just what it ees that you means."

"Do you?"

She leaned toward him. "I 'ave heard much about you, Monsieur Kyle. I 'ave heard that you pretend to be stupid, but that you are vary smart. If this ees so, you must know that sometimes theengs are not as they seem. *Vous comprenez, n'est-ce pas?"*

"More riddles," said Smooth. "Suppose we stop clowning. I like your accent but you've been in this town for the past eight years. You speak better English than I do. Let's stick to that."

Marie made a mouth. "Is that a nice way to treat a girl?" she asked quietly. The accent was gone entirely. "Lots of people would be glad to have me sit at their table—and they'd like my accent, too."

"Why not sit with them?"

"Because I'd rather be with you."

"Again, why?"

SHE folded her arms on the edge of the table and looked at him. Amusement was in her eyes. "Perhaps, it is because you are so rude. You interest me, Monsieur Kyle. I noticed last night that you also interested Nadja Sherene. I have been told she is a very dangerous woman."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, some friends of mine. Ordinarily I wouldn't repeat it, but I think you are the sort of man who can take a tip without letting it go any further. It might cause me a great deal of trouble if it were known that I had warned you against Nadja."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you that," said Marie softly. She leaned closer to him. "I can't even tell you how I know you are working on a very difficult case for your government. But I can warn you that your work isn't a secret."

"Thanks for nothing," said Smooth. He laughed. "You tell me I'm in tr ble but you don't tell me why, how or when. Suppose you forget the double talk and let me have it straight."

She shook her head. "I can't say any more, except to warn you again. Don't trust Nadja Sherene. Don't trust anyone. Don't even trust me!"

Mark Hesson's laugh was short. "Don't worry, Marie—he doesn't."

A dark-featured man in a neat business suit came to the table. Under his arm was a briefcase which he put on the table. He smiled at Marie and opened the clasps of the case.

"Sorry I'm late," he said. "I couldn't get the orchestrations finished this afternoon so I kept at them. The last eight bars were the tough ones."

He drew out some sheets of manuscript paper and handed them to Marie. She thanked him and introduced him to Smooth and Mark Hesson—Arbe

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Bellows, a newcomer in the music world but one whose orchestrations were noted for their cleverness.

Mark asked him to sit down but Bellows refused. He must do another score before he quit. He'd like a drink but simply hadn't enough time. He snapped the clasps on his briefcase and left the table. Marie looked at the scores, humming the tune of each as she did.

"I wonder," said Hesson slowly, "why he had trouble with the last eight bars?" He looked meaningly at Smooth. "If Bellows is as good as they claim, the last eight bars of any orchestration should be easy. All he has to do with them is round out the theme."

Marie glanced up from the music. "It was only an excuse for being late." Then she smiled.

She said:

"Are you a musician, Monsieur Hesson?"

"Just an amateur," said Mark. He put out his hand. "Mind if I look at those orchestrations?"

"Not at all." Marie handed the scores to Hesson and then pushed back the cuff of Smooth's coat to glance at his wrist watch. "Keep them until I come back. My orchestra goes on the air in a few minutes. You will excuse me?"

"Go right ahead," said Smooth.

"And you will wait until I come back?"

"Why not? I've got nothing else to do."

MARIE left the table and hurried to the stand. It lacked a few minutes of midnight and the Club Yvonne was filled to capacity. The crowd applauded as she stepped forward and lifted her violin. She bowed and made a mouth at Smooth. He smiled and turned to watch Mark Hesson. The ex-gambler was studying the scores, humming the tune of each. When he had finished, he passed the manuscripts to Smooth.

"That crack about the last eight bars was a phoney," he said quietly. "They're practically a repeat." He turned to watch Marie conduct. When she reached the modulation at the end of the first chorus that lifted the number a key, he winced and shook his head. "There it goes again. Sour—that same sour combination I've heard her use before. Almost the same, at least. Do you get it, Smooth?"

"Yeah. Maybe her finger slipped."

"Maybe you're slipping," said Mark.

"You mean it's a code?"

"Why not? She's on the air—coast to coast broadcast."

"Nice guessing," said Smooth. "She could get a message through to almost any state from here to California that way. Thanks, Mark."

He looked at the scripts on the table. Smooth knew little about music. The notes meant nothing to him, but as he ran his fingers across the scores his smile broadened. Braille again. A long message this time, cleverly pressed into the paper along the staffs.

"Number Sixteen reporting to Number Eight," he said thoughtfully.

"Number what?" said Hesson.

Smooth pointed to the score. "These birds like codes—lots of them. There's a message on this for an agent whose number is eight. Marie is probably calling him with those sour notes."

"I get it," said Hesson. "Bellows passed her the number in his crack about the last eight bars."

"I think so," said Smooth.

He ran his fingers along the raised dots on the score, repeating the message slowly: "I regret to report that Edward Engel cannot be made to co-

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operate. Without his help it will be impossible to bring down Hodkins' plane. Would suggest you send an agent to my restaurant and I will point out Engel. He must be killed immediately. I am still trying to buy another mechanic here but am afraid it is helpless. Another plan must be used. Advise Center at once. Number Sixteen."

Smooth read the message a second time. Then again. He checked back from one sentence to another, adding the ideas they presented. Number Sixteen was trying to buy another mechanic. That meant Edward Engel must be a mechanic. If Engel could bring down Hodkins' plane, he was undoubtedly working at Mitchell Field. Number Sixteen was trying to buy another mechanic *here* — at Mitchell Field. He wanted an agent sent to his restaurant—at Mitchell Field. Engel must be killed to keep him from reporting to the authorities, but Number Sixteen was afraid the present plan was hopeless. That must be the plan Nadja had told to Smooth—the plan in which the bomb-sight would be taken from Lieutenant Hodkins' plane and delivered to Center aboard the *Malay Princess*.

In other words, Smooth Kyle was right back where he had started. Center was still in the clear and five minutes after he received this message would be working out another scheme to get the sight.

BUT suppose he didn't get this message? Then everything would remain as it was. Nadja would wait until Hodkins left for Mitchell Field. She'd report to Center and receive new instructions. She'd pass them along to Smooth. And when she delivered the sight, Center would radio the news to Europe to close the deal. Then it would be Smooth's turn. His turn—if he could keep things rolling.

The first job was to keep Center happy. Smooth took one of the other sheets of manuscript paper and turned it face down on the table. The imprint of the staff lines showed faintly through the paper and Smooth took a wooden match from the tray before him.

Slowly, reversing the words as he went, he pressed another message into the score. Three vertical dots and another beside the lowest—that was the word sign for "very." It followed the usual introduction in which Number Sixteen reported to Number Eight. Next came "happy" and the message went slowly on to completion.

When he had finished, Smooth turned the paper and ran his fingers over the raised signs—"Very happy to report that Edward Engel will coöperate. He has his instructions and will follow them. Advise Center at once. Number Sixteen."

There were a few corrections to be made and Smooth breathed a wish as he made them. It was a long shot—a thousand to one chance the note would go across. But Smooth was playing any odds that went up on the board tonight. He had to.

"Give this to Marie when she comes back," he said to Hesson. He passed the new message across the table and folded the old one. This went into his pocket. "I don't think you'll get any orders on the *Malay Princess* before tomorrow night. If you do, sit pretty and wait until you hear from me."

"Does that mean I have to stay in this place all night?" asked Hesson mournfully. "Can't I go to my hotel and grab some sleep?"

"Are you at the Windham?"

"Yes."

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"I'll reach you there if I need you. But don't leave here until Rags Donovan gets my message."

Hesson nodded wearily and Smooth left the table. He hurried to the checkroom, bought back his hat and stepped into the street. Riley turned to whistle up a cab but Smooth shook his head.

"I want Red, or one of the old-timers."

"Bo Meyer is on the line," said Riley. "He's last out. Will he do?"

"Couldn't be better," said Smooth. He hurried to the rear of the line where a driver with tired eyes and a lined face sat hunched behind the wheel. Smooth opened the door. "How long will it take you to get me to Mitchell Field, Bo?"

"'Bout an hour, Smooth," said the driver. He touched the starter button. "That's past Garden City. Quite a run."

"How long if I pay the fines and slip you a double sawbuck?"

Meyer was racing the cab toward Fifth Avenue to catch the green light. "I might knock off a few minutes," he said doubtfully. "You used to be the speed merchant in this town—not me. Promise not to crack up the crate and I'll let you do the drivin'."

"Fair enough!" said Smooth. He laughed. "Climb out from behind the wheel when we hit the next light. If I don't get this rig into Garden City in a half hour, I'll buy you a new one."

"Never mind the new one!" said Meyer quickly. "Just get this one there in one piece."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CAGEY MECHANIC

HE STOPPED at the light and opened the side door. Smooth was already in the street. He settled himself behind the wheel as Meyer climbed into the rear. The light changed and he slipped the car into gear. The motor hummed. A nice pickup. Meyer owned his own cab and kept it in shape. Smooth rolled north to Fifty-eighth and swung east toward the Queensboro Bridge.

For a time he made no better speed than other cabs rolling beside him. No use going crazy. He'd spent too many years behind a wheel to gamble with a strange car. A mile—maybe less and he'd have the feel of the rig. Then Meyer would get a ride!

The upper level of the bridge was crowded with cars taking Long Islanders home from theaters and night clubs. Nothing to do but stay in line. The minutes slipped past. Once off the bridge he stepped down on the gas.

The cab leaped forward and Meyer howled. They slid screaming into a turn that burned rubber. Meyer howled again. Smooth missed an elevated pillar, cut past a truck and kept rolling.

"Nix!" yelled Meyer. "Gimme back the wheel and I'll pay *you* twenty bucks!"

"You must be getting old, Bo," laughed Smooth. "Lean back and go to sleep."

The lights went red but Smooth kept rolling. A car came out of a side street and Smooth kicked the brake pedal, swung the wheel and fed gas. Meyer raised the ante. Thirty dollars if Smooth would quit. Forty! He asked himself and the world at large why he had ever trusted Smooth Kyle with a wheel.

"Look, feller," he cried. "If ya flatten out them fenders a little, at the rate we're goin', the crate will fly!"

Smooth laughed but didn't answer. He was trying to figure his way through a winding maze of new roads. He'd forgotten about the World's

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Fair — forgotten new highways had been cut and old streets changed.

He passed a dozen lights. Found himself in a clover leaf design and felt a hand bounding against his shoulder. The hand opened and a finger pointed the way. Meyer was speechless but he was doing his best. Smooth kept the cab rolling.

He left Queens Boulevard, swung into the Parkway and raced toward Braddock Avenue. Another turn and he was on the Jericho Turnpike, hoping his luck would hold and no speed cop would slow him down.

Meyer had regained his voice by the time they reached Garden City. He directed Smooth to Steward Avenue and the cab rolled along the well paved roadway toward the gate of Mitchell Field. Red lights blinked in the darkness, outlining the field and the one adjoining. Smooth slowed the cab as he reached the gate.

"Are there any restaurants around here?" he asked Meyer.

"You mean you came all the way out here to eat?" yelled the driver. "With a thousand cafeterias on Sixth Avenue—you came out here?"

"I'm looking for a place where a mechanic from this airport would eat."

"He'd be an army guy," said Meyer. "He'd get his grub in the mess hall or at the canteen."

"Could he get a drink there?"

"No."

"Where would he go?"

"At this time a night he'd go t'bed!"

"I mean for lunch—you mug!"

"Over the fence and into town," said Meyer. He pointed toward the wide stretch of Roosevelt Field that adjoined the Army airport. "If he's a mechanic, he'd gang up with other mechanics—civilians. Maybe with guys from that field over there."

"Good idea," said Smooth. He swung the cab and headed toward Clinton Road, turned right again and swung into Old Country Road. "Keep your eyes open and yell when you spot a place."

The dark forms of concrete hangars were just inside the high wire fence. Smooth heard the roar of a motor as a plane raced across the field in the glare of the landing lights. It lifted and circled into the darkness. Meyer was looking at the opposite side.

"There's a place," he said. "Over to the left. There's two of them—three. Which one do you want?"

"One guess is as good as another," he said, and stopped the cab. "Park down the road a way. I'll be with you later."

HE WAITED until Meyer had pulled away, then crossed his fingers for luck and headed toward a restaurant. There was a bar near the door and Smooth saw two men at the end of it. Others were seated at small tables the wall, drinking coffee and eating from plates piled high with food. Smooth asked for a beer. The bartender slipped a glass under the tap, knocked off the foam and placed it on the bar.

"Number Twenty-two," said Smooth. "From Center."

"Come again, brother," said the bartender. "I don't get you."

"Skip it," said Smooth. "I'm just counting my drinks."

The bartender looked at him, shrugged and walked to the far end of the bar. Smooth tossed a coin on the wood, emptied his glass and left.

It had been a good try and it got him exactly nothing. Perhaps there was some way in which Center's agents made themselves known to each other.

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Nadja had said nothing about it, and it was too late to ask her now. Smooth walked to the next restaurant.

This place had no bar. The tables were clean and the walls were newly painted. A few men of the night shift were sitting over coffee and food. Good food, too, by the looks of it. The portions were large and the cutlery was bright. Just the place for a hungry man. On the wall were signs that gave the prices of the meals. Others told that beer was five cents. Smooth sat down and waited.

Soon a round faced, laughing man in a white apron came to stand beside him. "Good evening," he said and handed Smooth a menu. "What would you like to eat? The corned beef is good—that's number four on the list."

"Number Twenty-two," said Smooth quietly.

The round faced man laughed. "The numbers don't go up that high, my friend."

"They do if you count from the Center. They go to sixteen, anyway."

It was a long one in the dark and it hit. The proprietor took the menu and glanced quickly about. "You are looking for someone? You know his name?"

"Yeah," said Smooth. He lifted his arm so Number Sixteen could see the outline of the holster beneath it. "I was supposed to meet a guy called Edward Engel."

"I understand."

"Where is he?"

"He should be here now. I told him to come at midnight."

"Beer," said Smooth.

The proprietor left and Smooth gave himself a mental pat on the back. A few more good guesses and he'd almost be willing to believe he was a detective. He turned his chair to place the wall at his back and watched the proprietor hurrying toward him with a foaming glass. The man set it down on the table and leaned toward Smooth.

"He's coming in now," he whispered. "Look out for him. He's tough and smart. Get him away from here before anything happens."

"Nothing's going to happen," said Smooth. "Scram and let me handle it."

NUMBER SIXTEEN went back to the kitchen and Smooth turned to look at Edward Engel. Like some of the others, he wore mechanic's clothes but his were army issue. There was a smudge of grease on his jaw and below it was a scar. Nobody's fool—this man. His eyes were hard and his lips were thin. He walked to a corner table and seated himself. Smooth picked up his beer and walked toward him. He saw Engel's eyes flick.

"Mind if I sit here?" he asked.

"Yeah, I mind. Find another table."

"Thanks," said Smooth. He sat down. "Be smart and keep your mouth shut. I'll do the talking."

"I don't scare easy, mister."

"That's what I figured."

"And I know you got a gun."

"Right again," said Smooth. He was studying the man's eyes. His face. The way his hand was reaching toward the beer glass. "Don't try a fast one with that glass because you won't get to first base. I'm good with a gun, feller."

"So what?"

"Order something to eat. We're going to talk."

Engel stared at Smooth. The muscles in his jaws worked and he folded his hands. When the proprietor came to the table Engel ordered a man-sized meal. When it was put before him he started to eat. Smooth waited until the proprietor went forward to wait

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on another customer, then he sipped his beer and put down the glass.

"You were offered a deal," he said quietly. "Why didn't you take it, Engel?"

"For the same reason I ain't takin' it now!" said the mechanic. "Joe has to take his chances. But if he ain't back by the end of the week, some of you mugs are goin' to get hurt plenty. Don't forget that I know how to use a gun, too."

"Patriotic, eh?"

"Yeah, louse—that's a good name for it!"

Smooth grinned. He liked Engel. Liked a man who could look across a table at a gun and call the man who carried it a louse. He figured Engel would do, whatever the setup. When the proprietor had gone to the kitchen, Smooth took out his wallet and showed Engel the card that identified him as a Treasury Agent.

"I came in on the second act," he said quickly. "Want to give me the story fast?"

"How do I know that card ain't a phoney?" asked Engel.

"You don't know, but what have you to lose?"

"A brother."

It was time to think fast and Smooth's head was tired. He remembered that Engel had said Joe would have to take his chances. That someone was going to get hurt if Joe wasn't back by the end of the week. Now he had said he might lose a brother. Added together it sounded like the old snatch racket again. Center and his crowd had simply moved a European method across the Atlantic and put it to use in New York.

GUESSING, Smooth figured it to be this: Engel worked at Mitchell Field. With his help Center could bring down Lieutenant Hodkins' plane. Engel refused to sell out his country, so Center had ordered one of his mob to grab Engel's brother, Joe. That was the pressure. But it hadn't worked.

Engel still refused to sell out. He'd kept his mouth shut on the off chance Joe would be released. He wanted to talk to Smooth but he was afraid.

"You're on a spot but you can't lose by talking to me," said Smooth. "I know you were told to bring down Hodkins' plane, and I know you refused. How I learned will wait for another time. The boss of this joint thinks I'm on his side. He thinks I'm here to give you the works. In fact, he sent for a guy to do just that and I got the message."

"It sounds screwy to me, feller."

"It is screwy," laughed Smooth. "But that's the way it goes."

"And you want me to do what?"

"Help me to grab the guy responsible for having your brother snatched. Come outside and maybe we can guess a way."

"You mean come outside and get a slug in the chest!"

Smooth spread his hands. "If that was the deal, do I look like a chump who would waste time talking?"

Engel measured him with his eyes. The mechanic was doubtful. Smooth could see suspicion in the man's face. Slowly it lessened. Engel nodded and pushed back his plate.

"Let's go," he said. "But maybe you better walk first."

Smooth led the way out of the restaurant. The proprietor watched them from the doorway of the kitchen but said nothing. One corner of his mouth twitched in the suggestion of a grin. When Smooth looked at him, the man nodded. Smooth made a mental note to

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come back and pick up Number Sixteen when the payoff came. He wanted to work on that face, himself.

Meyer was waiting on the seat of his cab when Smooth and Engel came down the road. At a nod from Smooth he climbed out.

"Take a walk, Bo," said Smooth. "I'll call you when I want you."

The hackman left and Smooth motioned to the rear seat. Engel got in and Smooth sat beside the mechanic. He closed the door and offered a pack of cigarettes. Both men lit up and the rear of the cab filled with smoke.

"How fast can you tell it?" asked Smooth.

"Fast enough," said Engel. "I've been here at the field three years. I'm one of the sergeants in charge of mechanics, and I've been trained to handle a certain instrument."

"You mean the new bomb-sight."

"Maybe."

"Go ahead—I'm listening."

"Two weeks ago Charlie made me a proposition and—"

"Is Charlie the man in the restaurant?"

"Yeah. He took the place over last year. Like I was sayin', he offered me twenty grand to do a job for him. That's more money than I'll ever see, but I didn't like the proposition."

"What was it?" asked Smooth.

"He showed me a gadget about as big as a watch, and wanted me to hook it on Lieutenant Hodkins' motor when the plane left for maneuvers in the south. It was a small time-bomb that would tear out the plane's ignition just five minutes after the take-off. When I tumbled to what he wanted, I took a smack at him and started to yell cop."

"Then he told you to shut up or your brother would be killed—that right?" said Smooth.

"Just about. He told me they had Joe and proved it by showing me his wallet. Joe's only a kid—not in the army. He's been working at Roosevelt Field as a helper but those lousy—"

"Take it easy," said Smooth. "They won't hurt Joe! They'll keep him alive to keep you from talking. I'll find where they've got the kid and we'll spring him when we bounce this mob into a Federal pen."

"And what do I do?"

"Take them up on the proposition. Get the twenty grand, put the time-bomb on Hodkins' plane and leave the rest to me."

ENGEL dropped his cigarette on the floor of the cab. He ground it out with his heel and turned to face Smooth. "If that's an order, I'll follow it," he said. "But not until I get an okay from my commanding officer. Maybe you're a Treasury agent. Then again, maybe you ain't! All this may be just a fast line. If you're on the level—let's tell it to the commanding officer.

"No dice!" said Smooth quickly. "He'd tell it to a colonel, the colonel would tell it to a general, and the general would have to pass it along to Washington. Before we could get an okay, the army maneuvers would be over and the whole deal would be sour. It can't be done, Engel. You've got to take my word!"

"Not a chance!" said the mechanic. "I know what that bomb-sight means to the army. Before I'd let some other outfit grab it, I'd let them stand me and Joe and the rest of the family up against a wall. I'm a soldier, mister. Just because I ain't wearin' a uniform, don't get me wrong!"

Smooth looked for a better argument. It wasn't easy. Had he been in Engel's place he would have done ex-

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actly the same thing. Or at least, he hoped so. Courage when you're facing a gun is one thing. But the type of courage Engel was showing didn't grow on rose bushes. Smooth knew it would be impossible to get cooperation from the army. Still, this deal had to go through!

"Look, feller," he said at length. "You talk like a New Yorker. Where did you work before you joined the army?"

"I was a mechanic, of course. I worked for some of the automobile outfits in town, then I hooked up with a garage."

"Were there any hacks in the garage?"

"Yeah—two small fleet owners."

"Did you ever hear of Smooth Kyle?"

Engel turned quickly to look at Smooth. He held out his hand. "Let's see that Treasury card again."

Smooth opened his wallet. "Don't let that first name throw you. My mother used to call me Peter but no one else took the trouble until I signed up with the Government."

Engel looked at the card thoughtfully. He looked at Smooth and then shook his head. "I can't take a chance," he said finally. "Sure, I heard of Smooth Kyle—lotsa times. I know he works for the Government but—I've never seen him, so I don't know if you're Kyle or Goebbels."

"Would you believe the guy who drives this rig?"

"No."

Smooth was getting edgy. He thought of a thousand ways in which he could identify himself but none of them would work in Garden City. "What garage did you work in?"

"The one on East Forty-first, near Tenth Avenue."

Smooth reached for the door. Engel might have picked any one of a thousand garages. Smooth was known in many, but this time the mechanic had hit the jackpot. Ben Freedman ran that garage—had owned it for the past ten years. His brother Abe, worked the night shift.

"Let's go, Engel," he said. "Both of us know Abe Freedman. If he puts his okay on me, will that be enough?"

"Plenty," said Engel. "But we're working right through the night on the bombers. Something special. I've got to be back here soon or I'm A. W. O. L.—and that ain't cake. Maybe I draw time in the guardhouse and somebody else takes care of Hodkins' plane."

"You'll get back!" said Smooth. "Wait here until I talk to Charlie."

CHAPTER XX

AFTER HOURS

HE HURRIED to the restaurant and walked directly to the kitchen. Charlie's eyes were round when he turned to look at Smooth. He'd been drawing a cup of coffee from a large urn; now he put down the cup. He hurried across the kitchen, moving quickly for a man of his weight, and closed the door. Then he stepped close to Smooth.

"Finished so soon?" he asked. "I hope you were not careless, my friend. It would be bad if Engel was found near my restaurant."

Smooth's eyes grew hard. "You fool! You should go back home for more training. You handled Engel the wrong way—almost spoiled everything! Be careful in the future or you will be put in a place where you can not make mistakes!"

"But I did only what—"

"Never mind what you did!"

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growled Smooth. "I have fixed everything. Engle has agreed to take orders. But now, before I go, I must see that you know what you are to do. How do I know if you can be trusted to finish this work?"

Smooth frowned at the restaurant owner as though he were a dog that had failed to obey a command. It was the safe way. Treat the man like so much dirt and he would think he was talking to a superior. Kick him, and he would grovel. Smooth wished he knew how to curse in Charlie's language. It might have helped.

"Speak up!" he snapped. "What are your orders—fool!"

"I am to wait," said Charlie, as though he were repeating a lesson, "until Otto phones and gives me the hour of the flight. I am then to get word to Engel, and give him the bomb. I am then to tell him his brother and the money will be at Marie's place."

"Marie's place!" said Smooth in disgust. "I suppose you have even forgotten the address!"

"No—oh, no! I remember it, and I have written it down," said Charlie. He took a wallet from his pocket and searched through it. His fat fingers lifted out a card and he handed it to Smooth. "Here! It is right here!"

"Dummkopf!" said Smooth. He grabbed the card and hoped his accent was good. "You must not write things! I suppose you have even written down the place where Engel's brother is now!"

"That, I am not so stupid to do," said Charlie. He tried for a smile, as though to ingratiate himself with this snarling superior. "But I will be most glad when he is taken away. I am worried while he is here. Suppose they should search and—"

"They will not search," said Smooth. "Treat him well until I come for him."

"When will you come?"

"When I am able!" cried Smooth. "Stop asking questions, you blunderer! Go back to your work and keep your mouth shut!"

He walked out of the restaurant and drew a deep breath of night air into his lungs. A dozen times he had felt a laugh rising in his throat as he looked at the cringing restaurant owner. A few more insults and the man would have been down on his knees, begging for mercy. Smooth realized how valuable his trip to Europe had been. Without it, he might have treated Charlie like a human being, and that would have been fatal. As things stood, the restaurant owner was firmly convinced he had been talking to a superior.

Smooth found Engel standing near the cab, chatting with Meyer. He motioned to him and climbed into the rear. Meyer sat at the wheel and waited for orders.

"Forty-first and Tenth," said Smooth. "Don't pick any buttercups on the way. You've got to make another trip back here before morning."

The cab rolled and Smooth leaned back against the cushions.

IT WAS almost three in the morning when Smooth left the garage and cabbed across town to the Club Yvonne. Freedman's identification of Smooth had satisfied Engel. It had been strengthened by a few hackmen who had pulled in early. When they called Smooth by name, Engel climbed into Meyer's cab, nodded to Smooth and started back to Mitchell Field.

So far, so good. But Smooth wanted a few moments alone over a cup of black coffee while he tried once again to fit some of the pieces together in the crazy puzzle. His head was aching and

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the jolting of the cab didn't help. French coffee would. The dark stuff that Jacques Boville's chef brewed might cut the cobwebs.

Too, he could check on his message to Rags Donovan and learn if Marie Roubard had unwittingly passed along the note he had pressed into the score. Then there was Gilda—she might have called it a night but Smooth doubted it.

He closed his eyes, pressed his knuckles against them and tried to guess what the headstrong blonde was up to. Things had been happening so fast during the past twenty-four hours that Gilda had found little opportunity to use her wits in this case.

True, she had made one attempt. Bret Daniel and Walter Kunz had done their best. And Rags Donovan had turned up one more of Center's crowd when he put the finger on the headwaiter. But Frederick was unimportant. He was merely one of a seemingly unlimited supply of agents in the employ of this one man—Center.

Smooth paid his driver and stood for a moment in front of the Club Yvonne. Other night clubs were emptying their patrons into Fifty-second Street and dozens of taxis were pouring through the narrow roadway. There were arguments, shouted insults and the grinding of gears as the cabs jockeyed for position and the drivers fought over calls.

A few hours ago there had been a free-for-all in this same street. Now it was forgotten. The radio cars were gone and a solitary police officer was devoting his entire attention to the snarl of traffic. But New York was like that. Its memory is short.

Riley, the doorman, still carried a bruise under one eye. He nodded to Smooth, winked the good eye and went about his business of grabbing tips. Smooth stepped aside as a group of laughing guests in evening clothes came from the doorway. He watched Riley bow them into cabs. Then he walked into the hall and motioned to Jacques Boville.

"Ah, Monsieur Kyle!" said the restaurant owner in his very best accent. "It desolates me to tell you it ees three o'clock and we are closing. Still, if it ees just one drink you wish—"

He smiled knowingly to one of his guests, as though to say a friend could always be accommodated. A man at the checkroom laughed and advised Smooth to make it snappy. Another advised him to make it rye. Jacques worked his way toward Smooth, calling his patrons by name and and asking if they had enjoyed themselves. Soon his head was close to Smooth's shoulder.

"Marie wants to see you," he whispered.

"How about Rags? Did he se anyone?"

"Mark talked to his man," s Jacques quietly. He stepped forward o help a lady with her evening wrap. *"Permettez!"* He adjusted the wrap carefully and used one of his ten-dollar smiles. *"Bon soir, madame!* I 'ope you 'ave enjoy yourself completely."

SMOOTH walked into the room that was slowly emptying. He wasn't sure about Jacques. The ex-bootlegger was a suave piece of work. Clever enough to hold his French down to the few words known to his guests. Clever enough to make his place one of the important spots in town. He might be clever enough to sell out the country that was giving him a living, if that could be considered clever.

Smooth didn't know, and just now there seemed to be no way of learning.

He waited until Jacques was free

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again and motioned to the restaurant owner. When Boville came into the room, Smooth pointed toward the waiters who were clearing the tables.

"Which one is Otto Bergen?" he asked.

"That tall one at the table near the dance floor."

"How long has he worked here?"

"Oh, about a year," said Jacques. "He's the best waiter I've got. Brings the carriage trade and knows a lot of big people by name."

"What big people?"

"Some Washington diplomats and a crowd from one of the consular offices. Five titles walked into this place right after he came to work. He's got a drag with the newspaper men, too."

"How come?"

Jacques shrugged. "Why not? He hears things at the tables and passes them along to the columnists. He handed Dave Haley the tip on the *Bremen* and Haley used it at the top of his column."

"That's all you know about him?"

"Just about," said Jacques. "Of course he gets a lot of phone calls, but most of them are from customers making reservations. They ask to speak to him personally."

"Then why don't you make him headwaiter?"

"He doesn't want the job," said Jacques. "I offered it to him before Frederick came but he turned it down cold."

"Thanks," said Smooth. He walked to the bar and nodded to the man who was serving. "See if you can dig up a hot cup of coffee. The stronger the better."

The bartender called a waiter and relayed the order. Smooth rested his elbows on the bar and looked toward the orchestra stand. Most of the girls had left but Marie was thumbing through some music with the girl at the piano. She turned presently and caught Smooth watching her.

"'Ello," she called. "I 'have wondered what became of you. Why do you run away—yes?"

"That's a habit of mine," said Smooth. "Want to join me in a cup of coffee?"

"No coffee, please. But I weel join you later—yes."

She gathered the music together and stacked it on the piano. Smooth sipped the black coffee that had been put on the bar and turned to watch the last of the guests preparing to leave the Club Yvonne.

The little girl in the red coat stepped out of the check room, and soon most of the waiters had cleared their tables and removed the cloths. Jacques opened the case of a switch box in the lobby and dimmed some of the lights. Riley came in, took off his uniform coat and said goodnight to his boss.

And went away.

The place took on that dreary look of emptiness that is part of a night club when the patrons have gone. It reminded Smooth of a Christmas tree, a few twisted pieces of tinsel still clinging to its branches, as it stood in the alley awaiting the arrival of the garbage man.

He sat down his cup when Marie left the orchestra stand and came toward him. She smiled and put a stack of music on the bar. Then she called to the bartender and asked for a cold glass of water. "Vary cold," she insisted. "With ice—yes?" The bartender nodded and turned to get the glass. As he did, Marie moved closer to Smooth.

"Get out of here, quick!" she whispered. "Don't ask questions, Smooth. Get going. It's your only chance!"

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SMOOTH had been looking toward the door, one arm on the bar and one foot on the rail beneath. He had been watching Jacques Boville arguing with the customary late caller who had stopped by for one more drink. Jacques' protestations were the usual line: "After hours, *monsieur!* I cannot serve you! Tomorrow—you weel come tomorrow." It had always been that way and probably always would. Some New Yorkers hated the thought of going home.

Smooth had only half listened to the argument, and his mind had been on the questions he would ask Marie. Now he glanced down at the girl beside him. Her lips were smiling as she thanked the bartender but her eyes were frightened.

"Give me that again," said Smooth quietly, "and tell me why."

"That man at the door—the others at the table!"

Smooth turned, and as he did, he came alive all over. His hands grew light and a tightness crept into his stomach. Two guests were still at a table near the dance floor. It was the only occupied table in the room and Otto Bergen was the waiter. He was talking with the men, apparently insisting they must leave.

But Jacques Boville was no longer arguing with the man at the door. He was backing across the lobby. In front of him was a man whose hands were deep in his coat pockets. He kept his eyes directly on Jacques and followed him as the restaurant owner backed toward the wall.

Two other men had come into the Club Yvonne. They walked to the wide doorway that led into the main room. Tall men with broad shoulders. Their hands were in their coat pockets and Smooth could see the outlines of their guns. Soon, another pair came into the lobby and closed the door behind them.

"Too late, now," whispered Marie.

"Scram," said Smooth. "And thanks for the tip."

She lifted the glass of water to her lips, sipped slowly and set it down. Then she picked up her bundle of music and walked toward the door at the end of the bar that led to the kitchen.

"Goodnight, Jacques!" she called.

"Goodnight, Marie," answered Boville. His voice was thin.

SHE opened the door and stepped back in surprise. Another man was there, hands in his pockets and hat pulled low over his eyes. He glanced toward Otto Bergen and the waiter nodded. The man stepped aside and motioned to Marie, indicating she might pass. Smooth figured his chances. Eight men in the place with guns. Nine, if Otto Bergen had one. The bartender was out. Smooth had caught one glimpse of the man's face and seen fright written large upon it.

"Get going if you can," said Smooth quietly. "Otherwise, get low and make a wish."

The bartender didn't answer. He had put both hands on the bar and kept them there, mute evidence that he wanted no part of what was coming. Three other waiters were in the room. Oldtimers who knew the answers. They kept their hands at their sides and walked slowly toward the door near the bar. The guard motioned them toward the wall.

Nothing had been said, and as yet none of the men had looked directly at Smooth. That helped.

He glanced at their faces and saw each was having trouble with his jaw muscles. Amateurs—men who were new in the killing trade. Their hands

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were held too deeply in the coat pockets. And the pockets weren't cut right. No professional would let a tailor sew flaps on pockets that were meant to carry a gun. These birds were from the Group. Fanatics, out to do a job for their Leader.

So that was the set-up.

Smooth waited for the play. No use starting the party. The longer it waited, the better his chances. He was a thousand-to-one shot now, but anything could happen to upset the odds. He looked toward the lobby and saw that Jacques Boville had lifted his hands to shoulder height. The restaurant owner was staring past the man who covered him and his eyes were steady on Smooth. They held for a moment and then moved slightly to the right.

Smooth's eyes followed and he saw Jacques was carefully pointing with his index finger. Smooth tried to cover his grin. He might have known an ex-bootlegger would figure an angle. Jacques' finger was pointing toward the open cover of the box in which were the light switches. He had backed toward it deliberately when he found himself covered. Now he was waiting for Smooth to give him the nod.

Otto Bergen had left the table and was walking slowly toward the door at the end of the bar. Smooth got that. Otto was too valuable to be risked in a shooting. Good old Otto! Smooth drew a deep breath. He braced his feet and rested one hand on the bar.

Then he gave Jacques the nod and jumped. . . .

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Forever Isn't Long

An Argosy Oddity

By FREDERICK LAING

"FOR that is a beautiful word, freedom," Captain Brozov was saying, "Yes, I suppose it can sound the same in any language. But in our country . . .!"

And then the General's dispatch came in. It dropped like a shell that wasn't quite ready to explode.

Brozov and I, we were alone there in the dugout. I remember very well. The muscles of his jaws bulged as he read the message. Then he tossed it to me across a table, and he shrugged.

"After all," he said, "it's what we've been expecting, isn't it? It's what we joined for, isn't it?"

I read the order to attack and shook my head.

"To die for our country," I said, "that is one thing. But to waste our lives attempting the impossible . . ."

Brozov interrupted.

"I agree, Lieutenant. It's impossible. Except for miracles. But after all, miracles . . . Look, my friend . . . Suppose the enemy really are low on ammunition? Look, the last paragraph of the General's order. 'Reliable information,' it says, 'fresh supplies of ammunition expected for Objective 5 shortly after dark tonight. . . .' You see? It's now, or perhaps never."

"Between ourselves," I said, "It's never."

"And if this is true," Brozov said, ignoring my remark and speaking as though he would convince himself, "well, if it is true, and if we can get them to spend enough of their bullets, and if a half, or even a third of us are alive when their ammunition gives out . . ."

"Yes," I said, "that would be a miracle."

Brozov sat down at the table and started a letter to his wife.

"Dear Anna," he wrote. I can still see it on the paper, in simple round letters. In the upper right hand corner he had written the day, the month and the year. 1917 it was, though it seems only . . . Forgive me if I sound banal, but every detail is so sharp, so clear.

THAT wife of his, I had met her once. Young and pretty, with thoughtful eyes. They had a son. He had never seen the baby. And now, perhaps . . . I tried not to think about this.

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He sat for several minutes, staring at the blank paper. He poked a pencil through his hair, searching for something to say. Finally he looked at his wristwatch and got up. He folded the paper absent-mindedly and put it in his pocket.

The General had been shrewd in assigning us to Objective 5. That hill, The Mud Pile, as we called it, was bristling with defenses. The company before us which had tried to take it had been wiped out. Literally. Every man of us must have felt that The Mud Pile was impregnable.

The General had been shrewd, because he knew that those of us who were under Brozov really had something to fight for. We had volunteered from many countries, but we were, nearly all of us, of the same nationality.

We were fighting to free our country from a foreign power—and all of us who had joined the side of the Allies, we knew that if we were captured we would be shot as traitors.

Brozov called in our top sergeant and told him we were going to attack. The sergeant didn't say anything except with his eyebrows. Brozov stood there coolly explaining about the General's dispatch.

"Spread it among the men," he said, "about that secret information. It's the only way we'll get them out of the trenches."

"It's treachery," I said, when the sergeant had left. But Brozov didn't seem to pay any attention.

"If there's a gambler's chance," he said, with that detached air, "If there's a chance in ten, they'll risk it."

And that afternoon we gave the General every opportunity to be right. Three times we went through all the motions of starting an attack, in order to draw out their fire—the advance barrage, the obvious attempt to shatter their barbed wire, and finally, our men would begin to cheer all along the line. They were under orders to make as much noise as possible, as though they were just going over, and were shouting to give each other courage.

The first time we tried it, the bullets showered against our sandbags like rain. I looked at Brozov. He didn't say anything. He put a steel hat on the end of a bayonet and the bullets ate it up.

And the second time, when the yelling started, it was just as bad.

But the third time, it was different. The enemy's fire was reduced to a few growls here and there. Some of our men believed, or hoped, it was a sign of the enemy's weakness—they began to cheer in earnest. That was what Brozov had been waiting for.

The signal for the attack was the word "freedom." It was spoken quietly from one corporal to the next. And before the word had died on the lips of the last corporal, the first attacking file had been stopped in their tracks. The force of the fire was unbelievable.

BROZOV came out with the third platoon, when it looked as though they wouldn't go without him. He told me to wait for the last. I didn't argue.

I passed within ten yards of him as we were starting up the hill. Even from that distance, I could see there was no use stopping. My friend Brozov died like a fly under a swatter.

I don't know what kept us going. There was that pathetic faith in the General's "information," of course. A pure piece of invention, but the end, they say, justifies the means. But we did reach the top somehow. A very few of us. If the enemy had known how few, they would never have retreated.

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For myself, they didn't find me until the next morning. If I could have lost consciousness that night—but I wasn't that lucky.

And Borozov—

They found Brozov the next morning, too. And later, when I came out of the ether, they brought me the letter Brozov had started. They didn't know what to do with it and I was his friend.

"Dear Anna," it said. You couldn't mail that much of a letter.

I don't know whose idea it was. It seemed as though we all got it at once. We had been talking about the cost. And the man in the cot next to mine had asked whether it had been worth it. "Brozov dead," he said, "Most of our brothers are out there. And you, Lieutenant, you, perhaps, will never walk again. Was it worth it?"

He was a little out of his head. But I reminded him what we were fighting for. And then we got that idea about Brozov—about his unwritten letter to his wife. We wrote her a note. And we signed our names, those of us who were left. The letter was sent out of the hospital and passed around.

I wish I could remember all of the things we said in it. That part is a little vague. Except for the last lines. Of course, I can never forget those last lines.

"He fought," we told her, "so that you and your son can be free—so that our country will never again be under a foreign rule. He died to make all the Czech people free. Forever free."

Wanted for murder!

Dread words . . . grim words. Nick Case, well-known mystery story author, clicked on the radio . . . the first words he heard were *"Nick Case wanted for murder!"*

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"ROPE for the HANGMAN"

by Frederick C. Davis

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WHANNE thatte wee wente to hyghe schoole—Pardon us, folks, but we always get to talking that way around this time of the year, what with thinking about April and an early pulp writer by the name of Geoffrey Chaucer.

For this Chaucer said some pretty nice things about April, which we (long ago) learned how to repeat (with a pronunciation that constantly baffled our teachers,) but never learned how to spell. They're still kicking around in the reprints of "Canterbury Tales," though, and are always good for another reading during the vernal equinox.

So hey! for April and ho! for Chaucer. We're happy to put in a plug for him in these pages because he was, in a way, the granddaddy of all first-rate English story tellers. And it's no secret that a lot of the best fiction lads are still getting their plots from him.

But—so far as we know—Chaucer never wrote anything about the far, frozen North. Thus it is now necessary, on the very threshold of Spring, to turn you over to another man: an expert on icicles. He has a thing or two to say about Frank Richardson (No-Shirt) Pierce, who presumably never made a pilgrimage to Canterbury:

HARRY BATCHELOR

I wonder if it would interest your author Mr. F. R. Pierce to know that there are no icicles in the far North. Icicles, as any school child knows, are formed by alternate thawing and freezing.

In cold countries like Manitoba and North Dakota, icicles will be seen sometimes on the south side of the house where the sun will warm things up a little in the middle of the day. But in the far Northern night where there is no sun, the idea is not only fantastic but displays scorn for the intelligence of your readers.

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

WE'RE going to run right off and file that away in our Things We Never Thought of Before department. As for the intelligence of our readers—can ARGOSY or F. R. Pierce have any doubts about that, when so many readers like Mr. Batchelor are watching so closely for details?

And scorn? Never, sir; *never*.

Here's a report on several interesting matters by

MILTON LOFALD

The ARGOSY serials I liked best in 1939 were "The Synthetic Men of Mars", "Lost Harbors", "Fast and Loose", "Rider of the Rifle Rock", "Thirty Days for Henry", "Hurricane Range", "River Rogues", "Remember Tomorrow", "Don Renegade" and "Rawhide Road".

I like a good fantastic story once in a while, but don't like stories like "The Ninth Life" and "Maker of Shadows".

"Lords of Creation" was very good and is the kind of fantastic I like. "The Ringer" was one of the poorest stories I have read in ARGOSY.

Tell Bennett Foster to not get disgusted and quit writing as I think he is one of the best writers you have.

Two very good novelets lately were "Christmas on Ice" and "When the River Ran White".

How about a serial by Harry Sinclair Drago?

I have a kick to make also. It makes me mad to see advertisements right in the middle of a story. Don't fill the reading pages of the ARGOSY with ads.

Most of the ARGOSY covers are nice, but the Feb. 3rd was poor. It didn't illustrate anything that happened in the story either.

Wish you would have the cover picture illustrate the serial whenever a new one starts.

DULUTH, MINN.

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SORRY about the ads, Mr. Lofald. We don't like to see them breaking into the middle of stories any more than you do; but sometimes, when there are a lot of ads for one issue, there isn't anything else we can do.

The ads make it possible for us to give you more and better stories, y'know.

As for the cover: some readers like 'em one way, some another. What are your favorites?

Finally, we pass on a letter that makes us as warm as April sunshine. Since reading it we've been having spring fever all over the office, stopping work every five minutes to throw handfuls of crocuses out of our seventh-floor windows. Vernal greetings to

B. G. MANSTEAD

You are about to hear from one of the readers of ARGOSY who has been faithful to you silently since 1913. Many are the good stories I have read and they are still coming good. No fault to find and no suggestions to offer.

Your new writers are all turning in swell stories and apparently you are able to recognize a good yarn without any assistance from me. Hope this conveys to you the thought that I am for one getting every cent of my money's worth once a week.

The idea of anyone sending in a list of "the ten best stories" and "the ten worst stories" gives me a laugh along with a pain in the neck. What pleases one will displease another particularly in the matter of reading, and no one can set a standard to suit every one.

For instance, let me tell you my likes and dislikes which are peculiar to me and only me. I never read a story by Richard Howell Watkins that has to do with automobile racing or horse racing. The stories are just as good as any in the magazine but I don't like them. Plenty of the readers do, however.

My favorite stories are the Zorro stories and those by the same author built around that locality; W. C. Tuttle's series of writings; and I particularly liked the Solomon tales, those about Peter, the Brazen, and anything written by Theodore Roscoe.

And in closing, let me say that I like your new crop of writers to a man, and more power to all of you.

AUBURN, MAINE

GATEWAY TO OBLIVION

My friend, Marseille is a splendid place to spend an enjoyable evening. Tonight, for example, you will drink wine with the Smiler, while a knife glitters dangerously close; you will feel the sinister caress of an Apache garrote, and it may be that you will hold in your hand the priceless glory of the Gypsy's jewel.

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DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

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Now, as he waits for the foul tentacles of the devilfish to encircle his throat, he knows that what he must do is to be done neither for a hundred dollars, nor to lay a ghost of the natives, nor even for a girl's love. For there is a phantom in every man, more monstrous than any spawn of the sea. A gripping short story of strange victory by

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